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(54) Grinding spindle mounting

(57) A grinding or polishing machine comprises a rigid platform on which a workhead spindle and a grinding wheel spindle are located. The grinding wheel spindle is mounted on a sub-assembly which is attached to the platform by means of flexures 104 which permit limited movement of the sub-assembly only in a direction in which the wheel has to advance to achieve grinding or polishing of a workpiece mounted on the workhead spindle. Two grinding wheels are mounted on the platform, one on each of two sub-assemblies, which are attached to the platform by flexures as aforesaid. The flexure mounting points are located generally centrally of the machine and are located on either side of and close to the machine centre line. The grinding spindle is advanced by a cam drive.

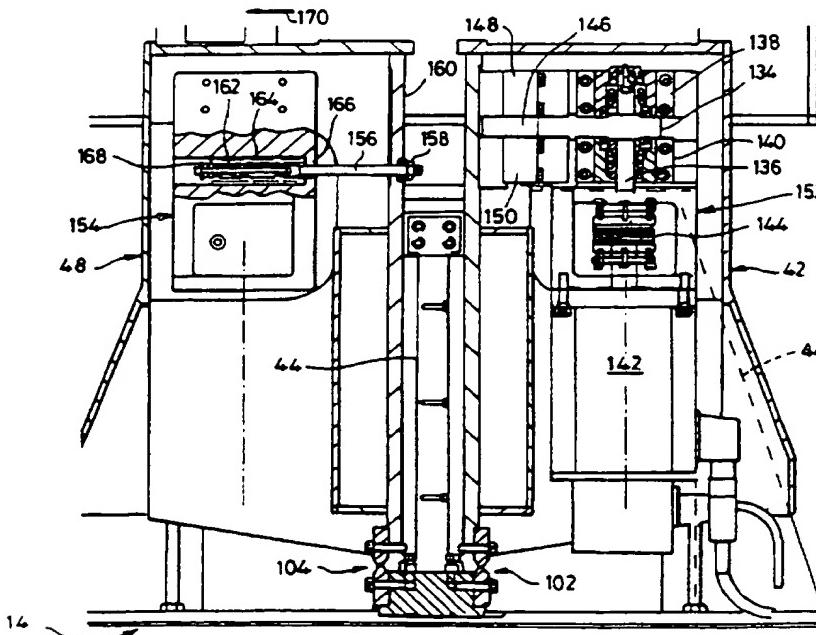


Fig.4

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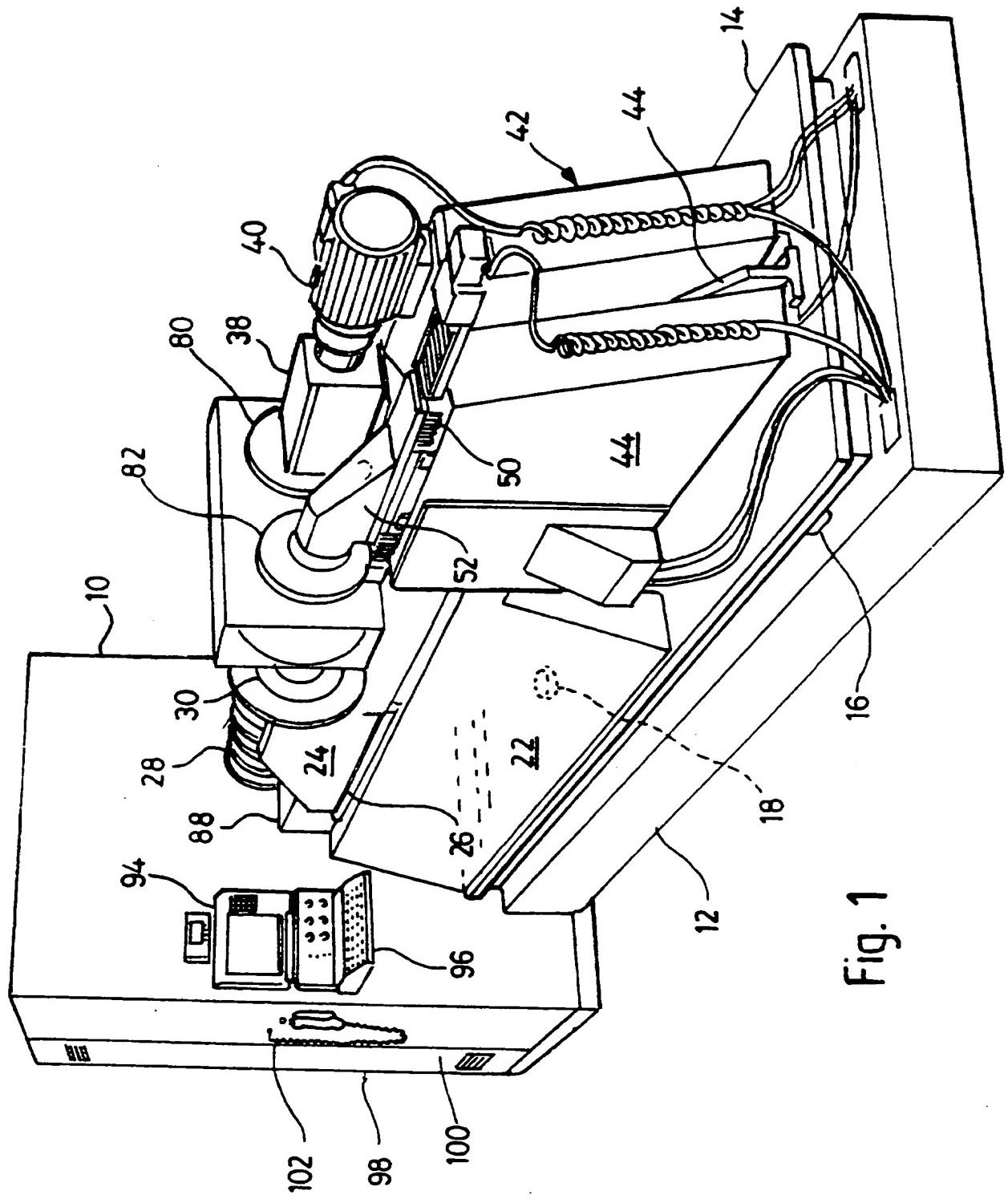


Fig. 1

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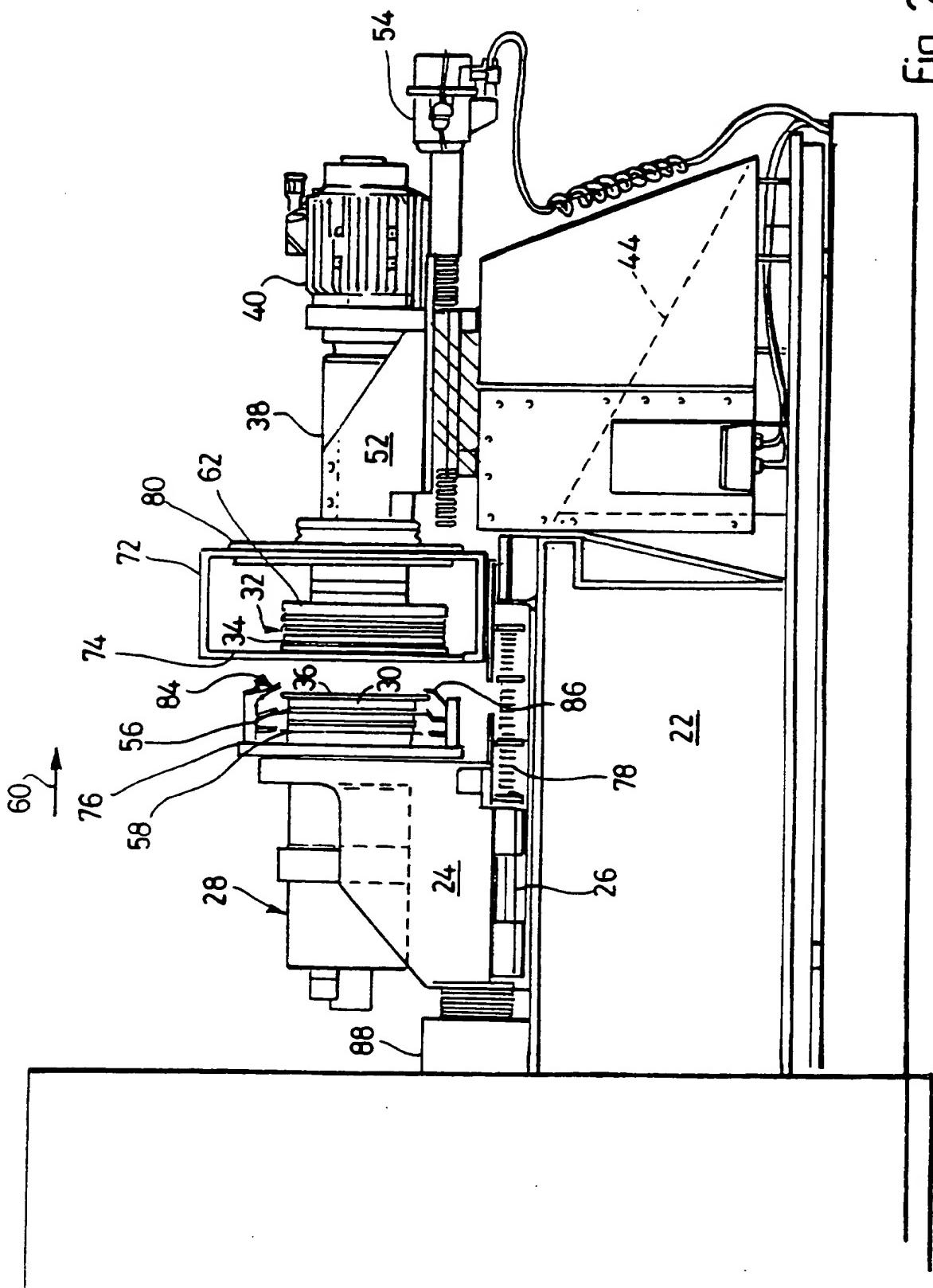


Fig. 2

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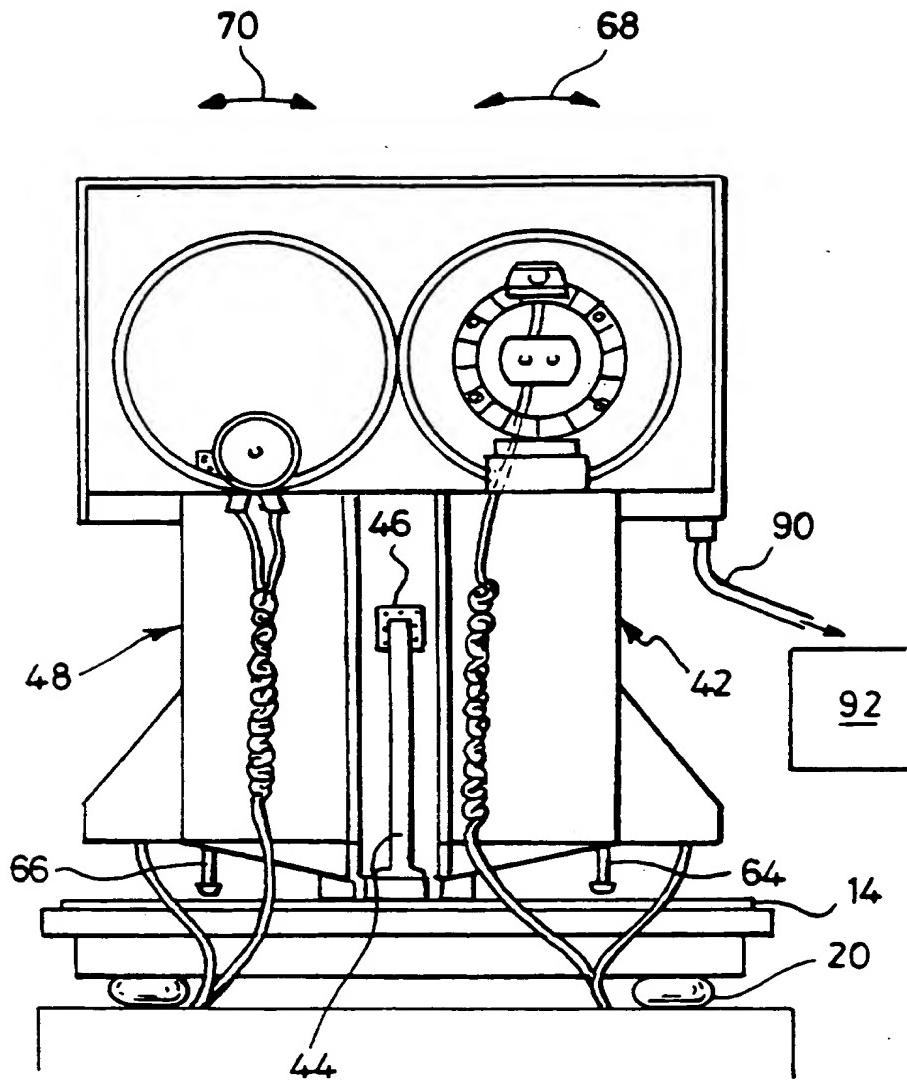
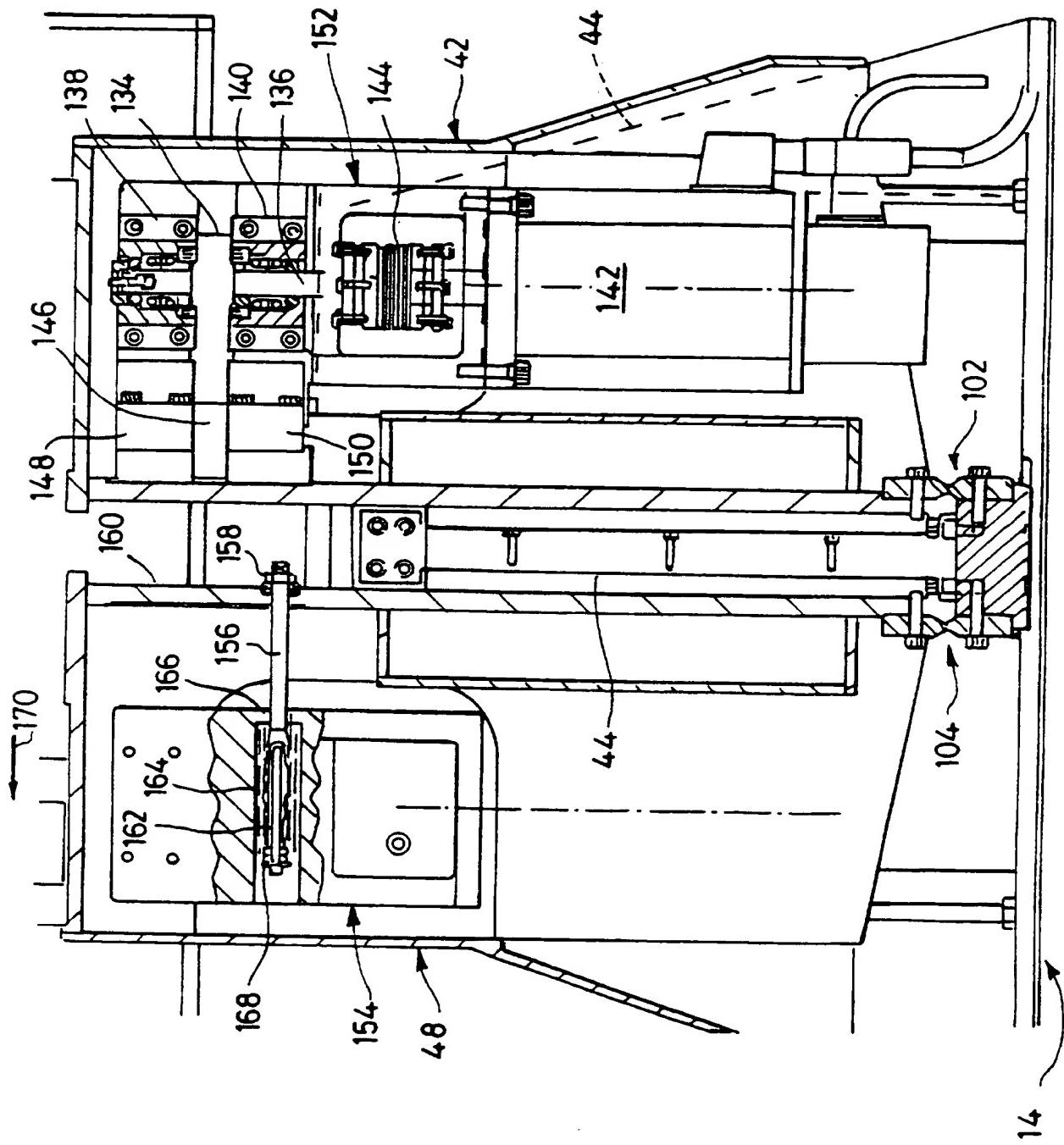


Fig. 3

Fig. 4



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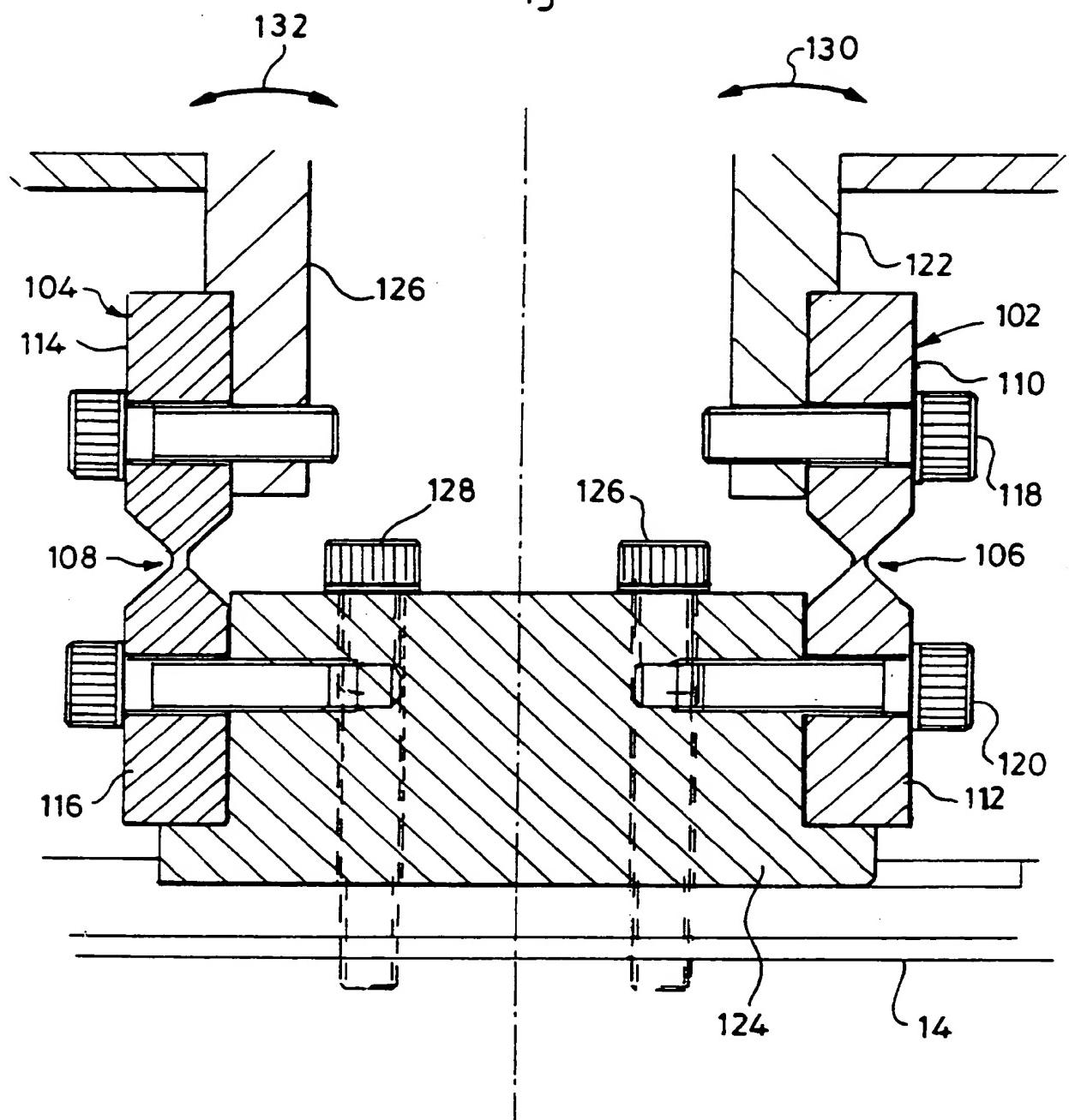


Fig. 5

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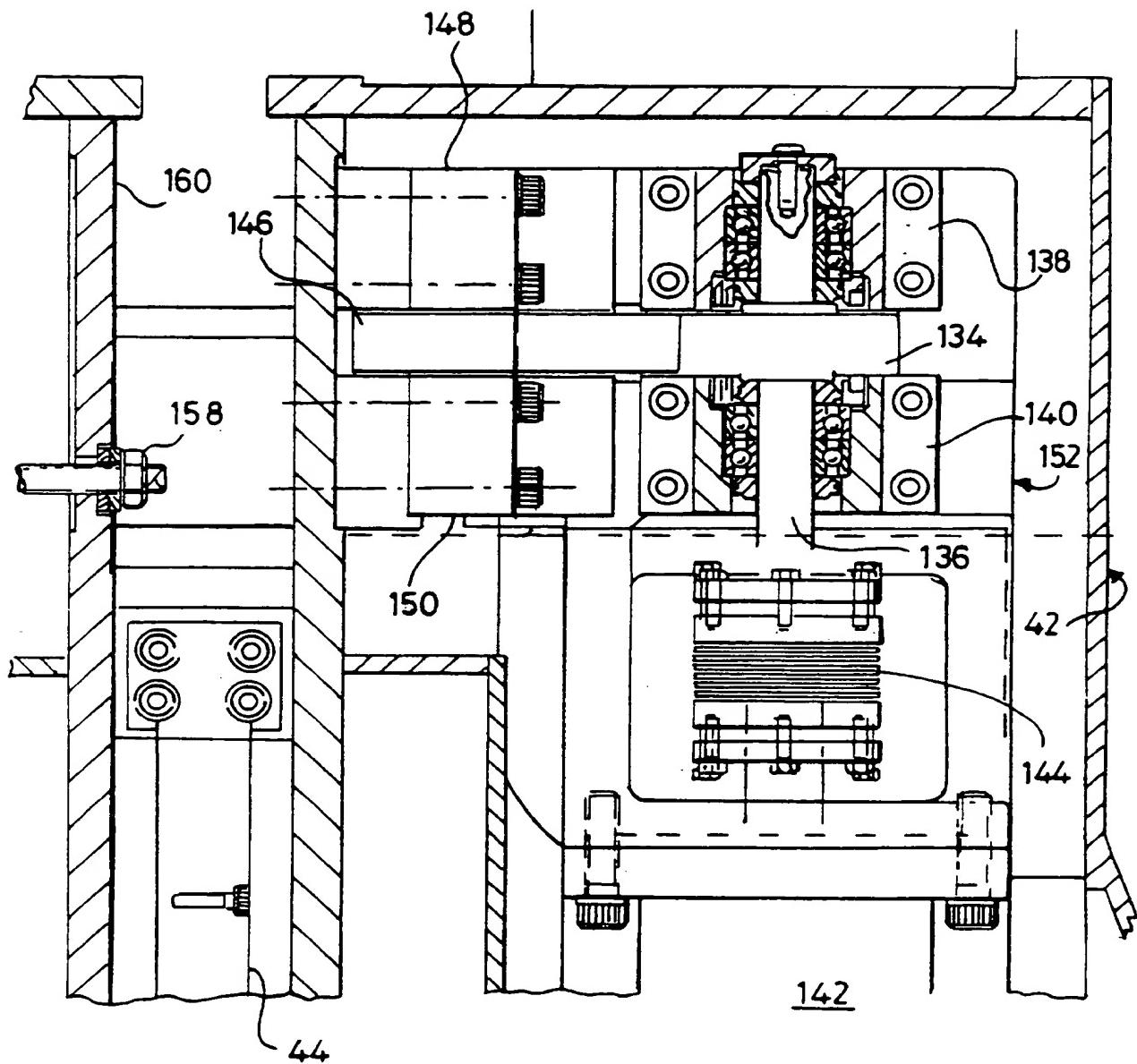


Fig. 6

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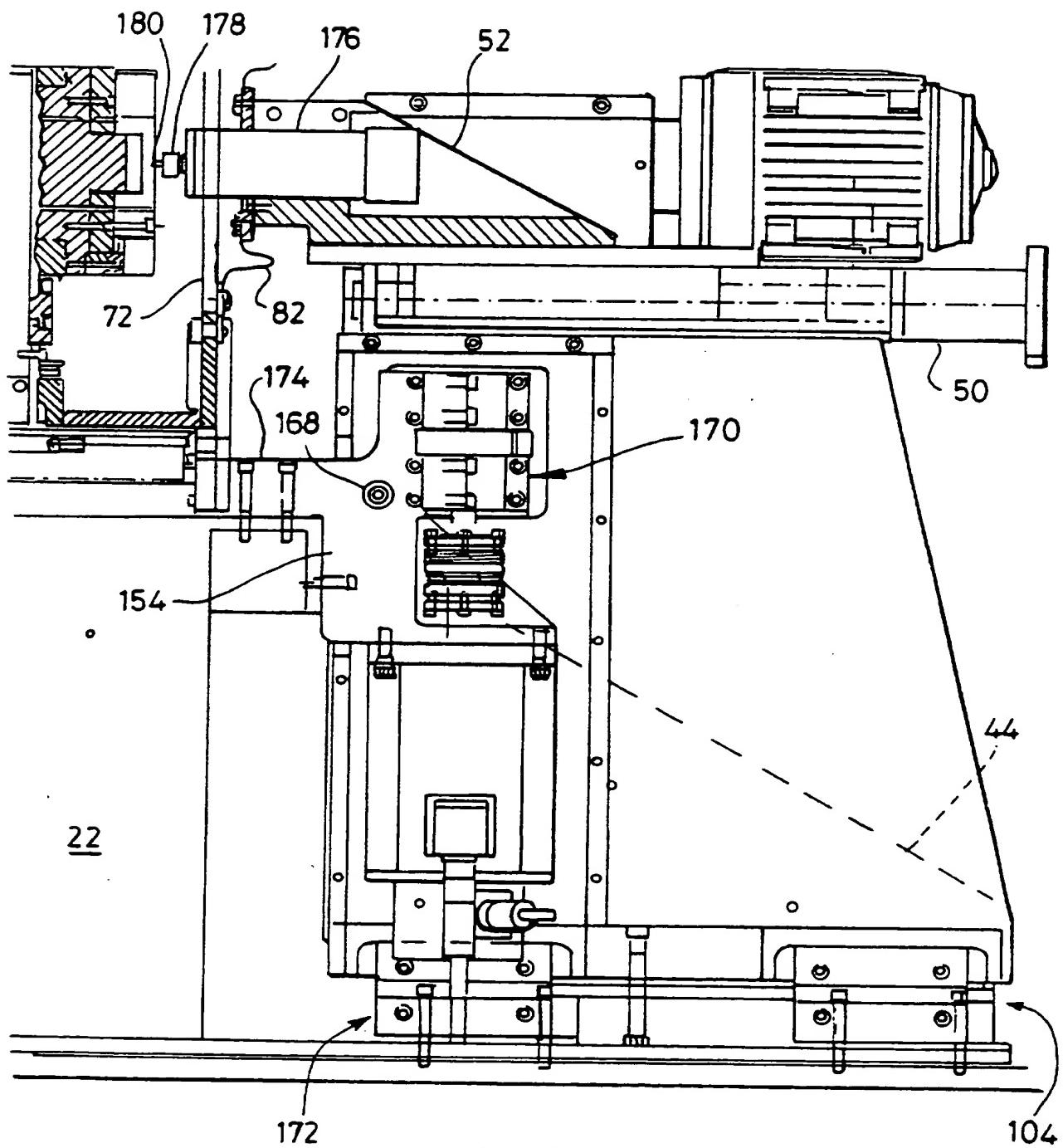


Fig. 7

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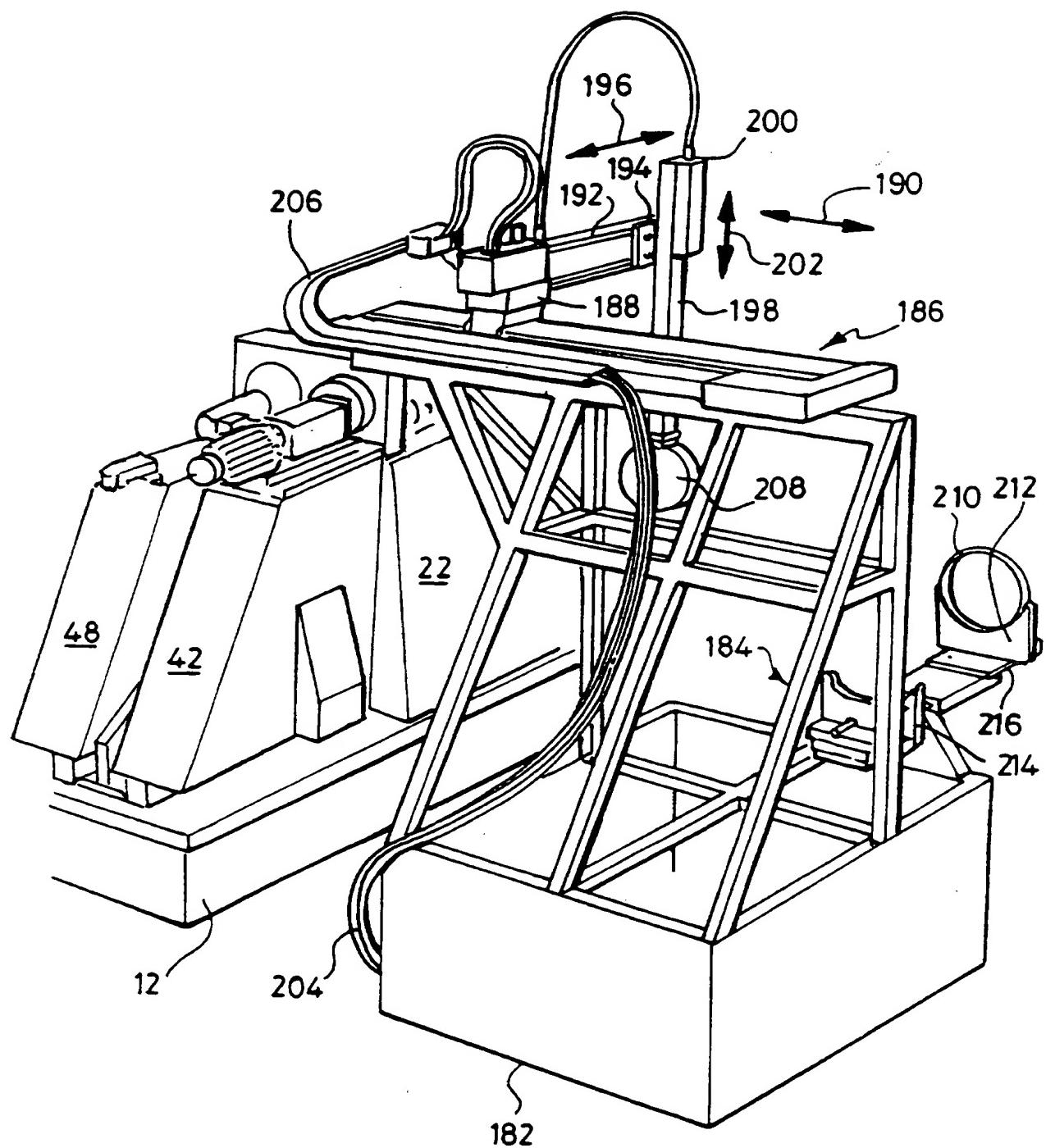


Fig. 8

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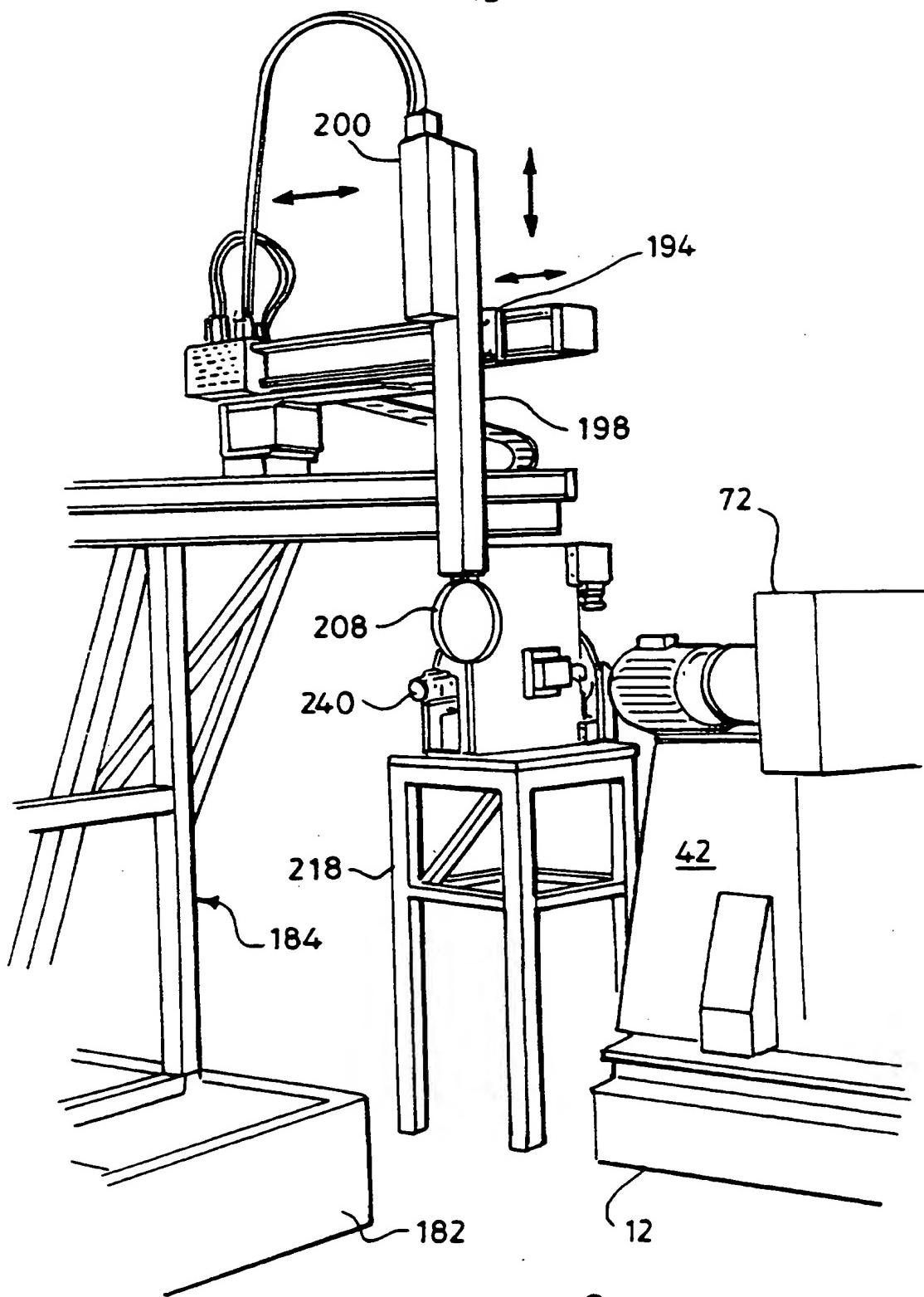
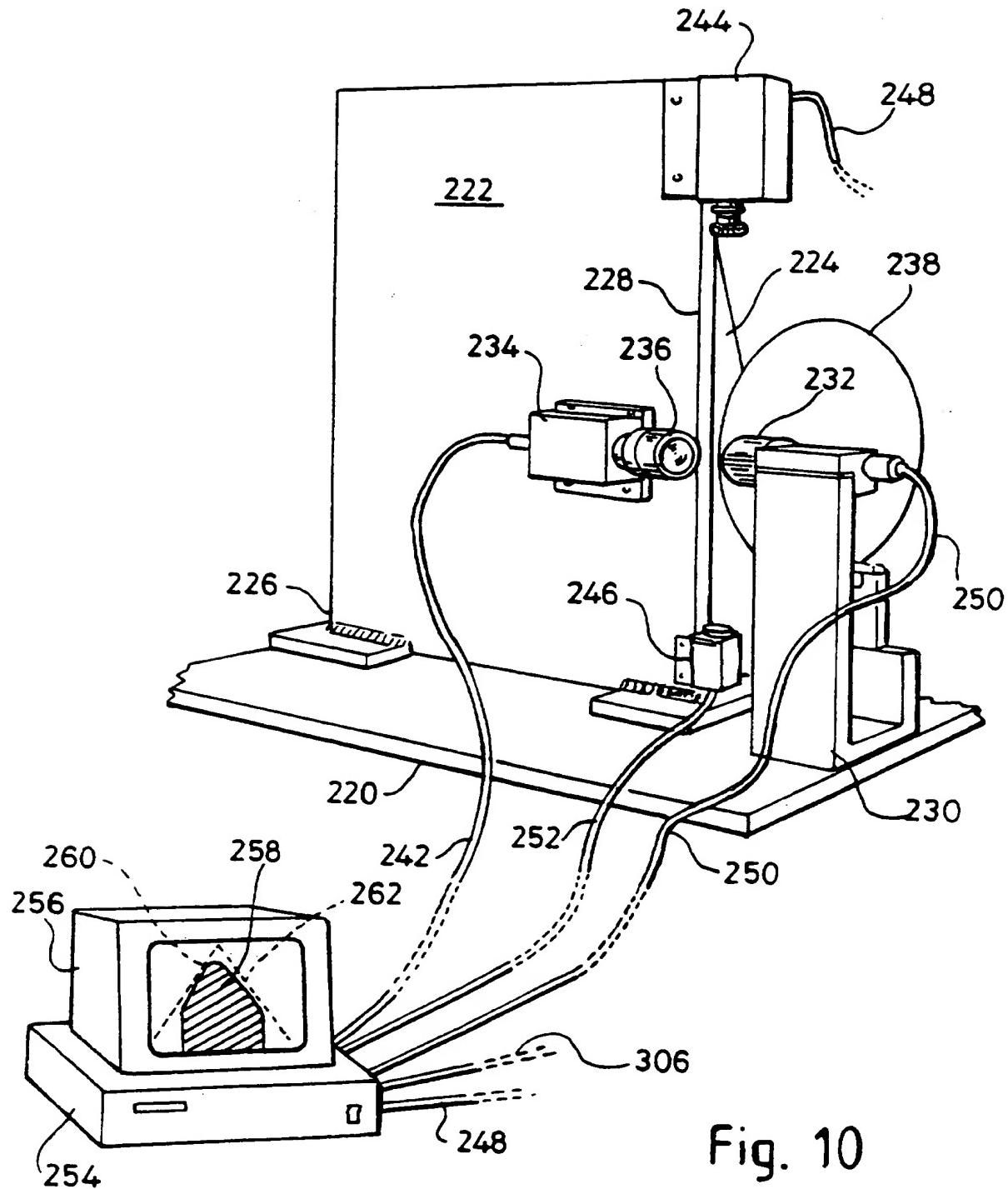


Fig. 9

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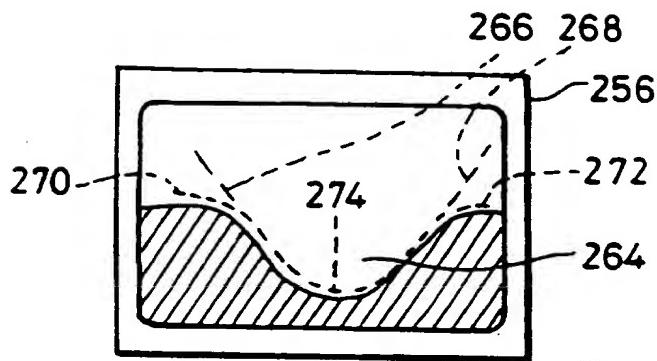


Fig. 11

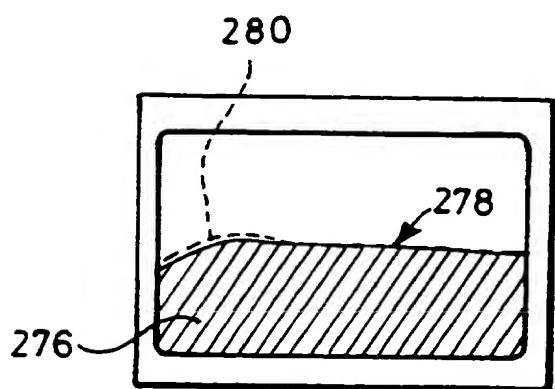


Fig. 12

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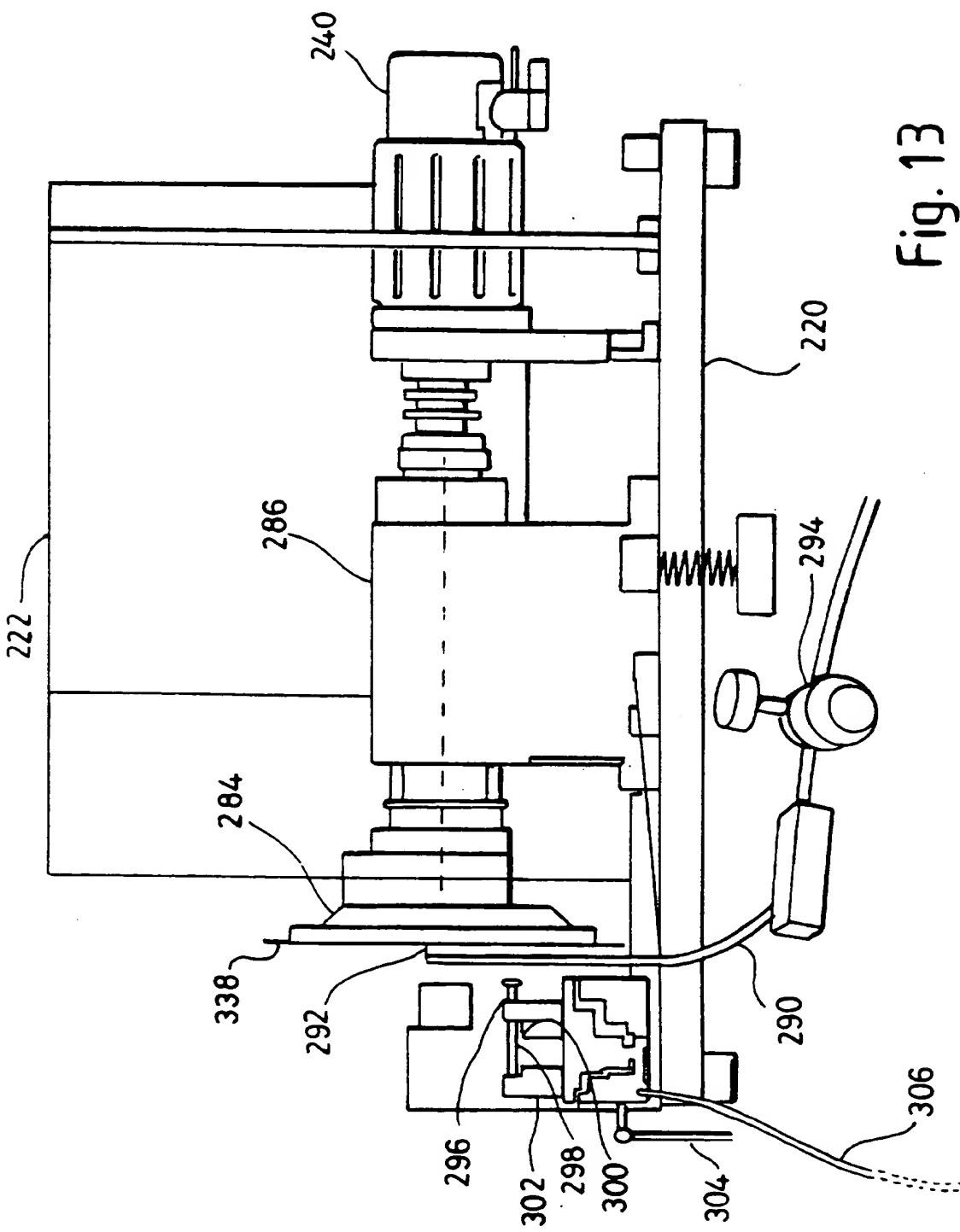


Fig. 13

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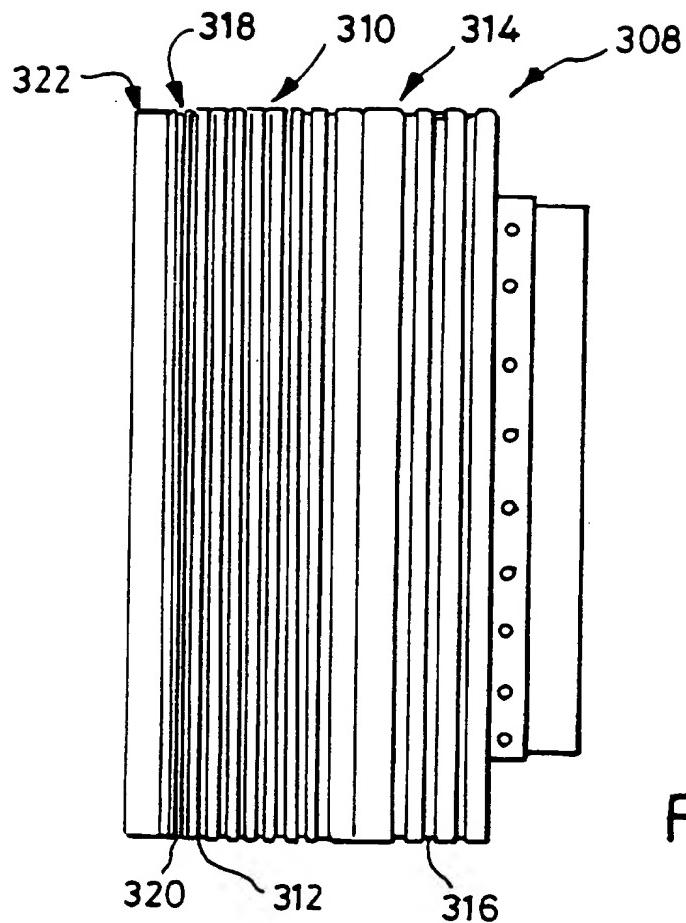


Fig. 14

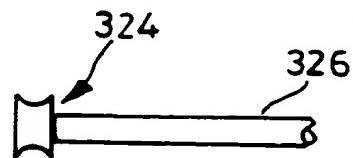


Fig. 15

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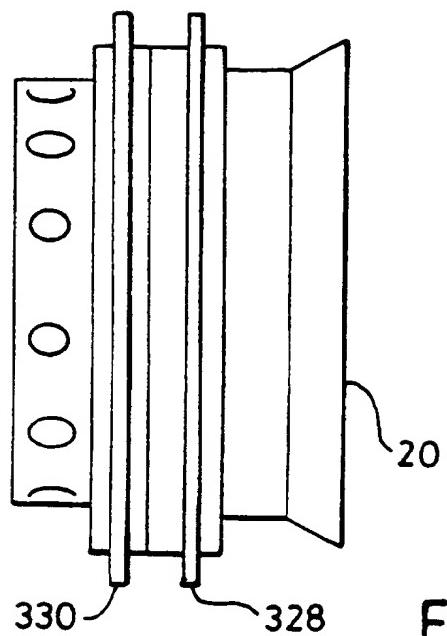


Fig. 16

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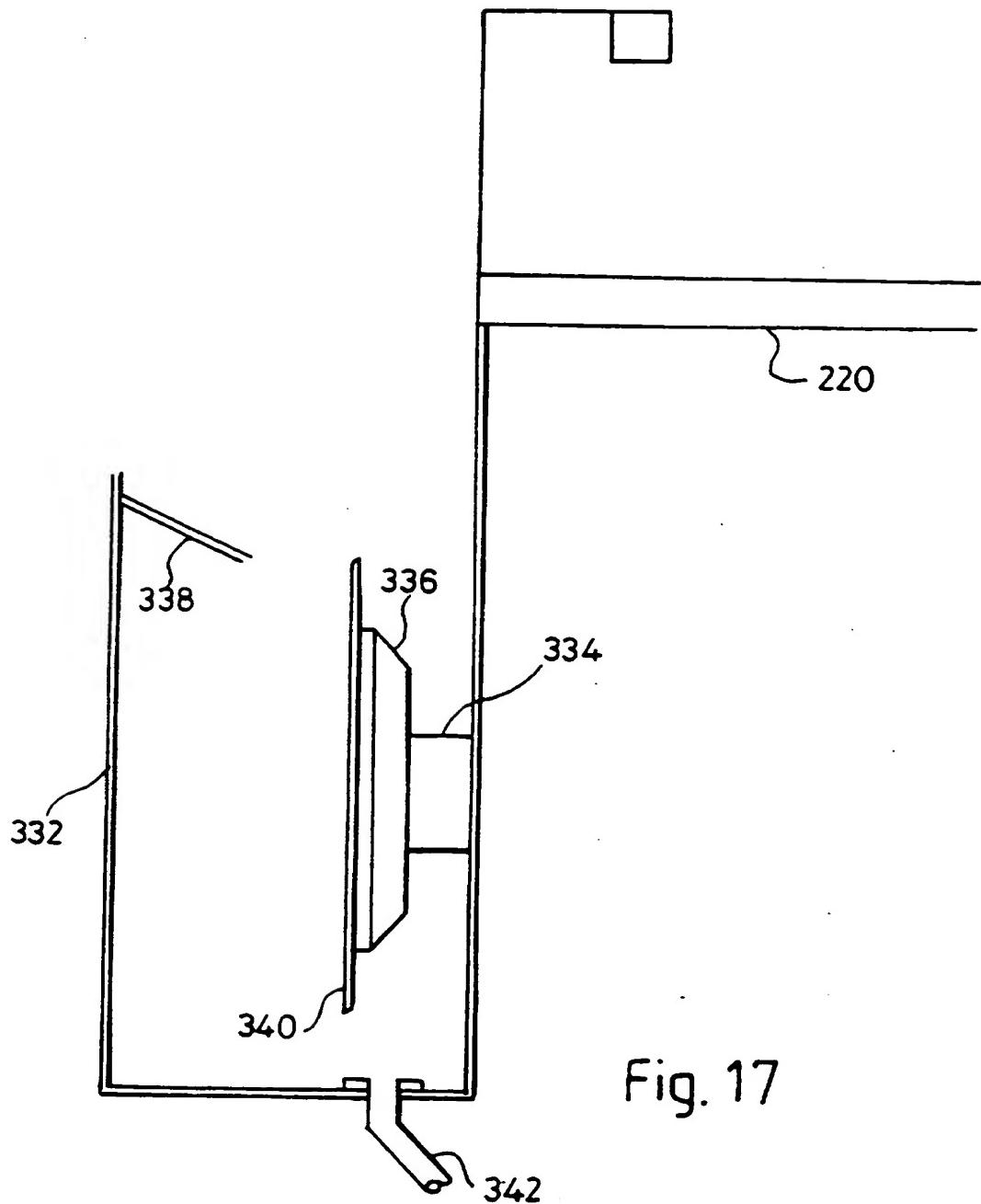


Fig. 17

Title: Improvements in and relating to grinding and polishing machines

This invention concerns grinding and polishing machines and methods of grinding and polishing discs such as wafers of silicon for use in the construction of semi-conductor devices, and discs of glass or other brittle materials on which magnetic material is to be deposited for forming magnetic memory disks for computer disk drives and the like.

Background to the invention

When grinding discs for either of the above purposes, it is important that the outside diameter of the disc is finished to a high level of accuracy and often to a particular cross-sectional form. In the case of memory disk a circular opening is also required again to an accurately controlled diameter and circularity. In the case of silicon wafers, registration in later manufacturing steps requires registration devices to be formed around the periphery of the disc such as the formation of flats and notches.

Conventionally edge grinding and polishing machines have incorporated linear slideways for all axes. Whether incorporating re-circulating rolling element bearings or air bearings, all such axes share a common failing when grinding and polishing brittle material namely they permit significant relative motion between grinding wheel and component. This arises from the need to provide for orthogonal movements of grinding wheels usually obtained by stacking one linear axis above another. This motion requires the use of hard wearing grinding wheels to minimise loss of form due to wear, but such wheels tend to produce poor quality surfaces with deep damage.

When grinding silicon wafers, the depth of sub-surface damage

arising during grinding should be minimised since to be used in subsequent manufacturing steps, a wafer must be delivered with zero damage. When sub-surface damage has arisen, this means a post grinding step of acid etching before polishing. Both processes are expensive, and the less the damage the shorter the polishing time that is needed.

Summary of inventive aspects

Machine construction

According to one aspect of the present invention, a grinding machine as aforesaid comprises a rigid platform on which a workhead spindle and a grinding wheel spindle are located, and wherein the grinding wheel spindle is mounted on a sub-assembly which is attached to the platform by means of flexures which permit limited movement of the sub-assembly in a direction generally parallel to the direction in which the wheel has to advance to achieve grinding or polishing of a workpiece mounted on the workhead spindle, the flexures generally inhibiting movement of the sub-assembly in all other directions.

Where two grinding wheels are to be mounted on the platform, preferably two sub-assemblies are provided, one for each grinding wheel, and each sub-assembly is attached to the platform by flexures as aforesaid.

Axis reversal hysteresis can cause damage during the grinding of a disc or wafer as the grinding axes are reversed after spark-out. By mounting the sub-assemblies on flexures which provide very smooth motion and only permit movement in one direction, axis reversal hysteresis is much lower than is the case where conventional linear axes are used.

According to another feature of the invention, the positions of the flexures mounting the sub-assemblies to the machine base are selected so as to reduce the effect of torsional vibration

within the machine base on the sub-assemblies carried by the flexures.

Preferably flexure mounting points are preferably generally central of the machine and are preferably located on either side of and close to the machine centre line.

According to another aspect of the invention, the flexures on which the sub-assemblies are mounted, themselves may be attached to a solid mass, preferably containing polymer concrete and preferably forming part of the base of the machine. In this way any motion of the sub-assembly or carriage is highly damped.

According to a further preferred feature of the invention, hollow cavities within selected parts of the machine may be filled or at least partially filled with polymer concrete so as to raise the natural frequency of vibration of the machine parts with the objective of providing minimum mass with optimum distribution of the damping/stiffening material.

The flexures typically comprise stress relieved steel links which are directly jointed to the platform on the one hand and spindle bearing sub-assemblies on the other.

Spindle mounting

The grinding wheel and workpiece spindles preferably are mounted in air bearings.

Workhead mounting

Preferably the workhead is mounted upon a preloaded slideway driven by servo motors and fitted with a high resolution position encoder.

Where the sub-assemblies are mounted on a horizontal extension of the machine base, towards one end of the mass of the machine, rigidity of the horizontal extension may be improved by mounting a rigid bracket between the extension and an end of the remaining mass of the machine.

Where the sub-assemblies are mounted symmetrically about the centre line of the base and are spaced apart, the bracket immediately extends on the centre line of the machine between the two sub-assemblies.

So-called coulomb damping is obtained by forming the bracket from three pieces and bolting them together.

Mounting for platform

In a preferred arrangement the platform is itself mounted through vibration absorbing means to a fixed machine base.

The machine base may be a single piece fabrication, but where vibration isolation is to be optimised it may comprise a two-part structure with vibration absorbing means between the two parts.

In a two-part structure in which one part is mounted above the other by the vibration isolation (absorbing) means, the upper of the two parts may be a metal fabrication which contains or is at least in part formed from polymer concrete so as to provide a direct, highly damped link between the mountings for the cams which move the spindles and the sub-assemblies and the workhead spindle guideway means.

Preferably the effect of torsional vibrations of the machine base on the grinding wheel stability is reduced by mounting the grinding wheel carrying sub-assemblies in a central position on the machine base. At that point in the machine base there is preferably included a section of polymer concrete

which provides high damping to the sub-assemblies.

Subassembly drive means

According to another aspect of the present invention, drive means whereby each sub-assembly is movable to advance or retract the grinding wheel spindle towards and away from a workhead spindle, comprises cam means.

Preferably solid cams are employed.

The cam means may operate in one sense only in which event return spring means may be provided for providing a restoring force in the opposite sense.

Alternatively the cam means may operate in both senses so that positive drive is provided to both advance and retract the sub-assembly towards and away from the workhead spindle.

In one arrangement the two sub-assemblies are spring loaded apart and the grinding feed is provided by appropriate inward movement of the cam arms. This feature of the invention allows rapid interpolation around the corners of silicon wafer flats, since the maximum sub-assembly acceleration forces act outwards, towards the cams.

Conventional machines use ball screw feeds which are inherently noisy as the recirculating balls engage and disengage the ball mount. The noise appears as imperfections in the grinding process. By driving the sub-assemblies through solid cams and mounting the cams between two pairs of high precision angular contact bearings, additional stiffness is introduced into the assembly. A machine constructed thus will not introduce mechanical rumble during grinding.

By mounting the cams very close to the workhead axis bearing rails and directly linking them by polymer concrete, a very

tight and highly damped stiffness loop is produced.

Where drive to the relatively movable parts of a machine is achieved through ball screws, such a drive has to be disconnected and a secondary mechanism must be engaged if for example force control is to be imposed instead of position control so as to achieve polishing as opposed to grinding. However it is an advantage of this aspect of the present invention that by driving the sub-assemblies through cams, the motor drive can be switched between position and torque control without the need to disconnect any drive since the cams can be back driven. This is of significant advantage since it can allow a grinding machine to function as a polishing machine without any adjustment other than altering the drive to the cams.

Combined cam drive and flexure mounting

By using cam driven sub-assemblies mounted on flexures attached to a common platform as aforesaid in accordance with the invention, a short stiffness loop is created between grinding wheel and workpiece, thereby reducing the risk of relative movement between wheel and workpiece during machining.

Grinding wheel selection and dressing

Normally the edge of the disc is machined so as to create a generally triangular or trapezoidal edge profile to the disc. In order to achieve this the surface of the grinding wheel is formed in a complementary manner so that as the wheel is engaged with the workpiece the complementary form is generated around the edge thereof.

The edge profile will only be generated accurately if the complementary form of the grinding wheel does not alter. Clearly as the grinding wheel wears, this profile will change and periodically such wheels have to be re-formed using a

suitable forming wheel for resin bond wheels or spark erosion for metal bond wheels. Hitherto at least the initial forming of the complementary grinding wheel profile has been done "off machine" since hard wearing grinding wheels have tended to be used.

By constructing a grinding machine in accordance with the invention, so as to restrict if not eliminate unwanted relative motion between workpiece and grinding wheel, it has been found that softer grinding wheels can be used.

Resin bonded CBN or diamond wheels may be employed, although optimum efficiency may be obtained by using a harder grinding method such as a metal bonded CBN or diamond wheel in a preliminary rough grinding step and then using the softer wheels to finish grind. The different wheels can of course all be mounted on the same spindle.

Each grinding wheel may be provided with a plurality of grooves, which can be used in turn, as each in turn becomes worn, until all the grooves need re-forming.

Resin bonded wheels have been found to produce very low subsurface damage when used to grind edge forms, and can be formed in situ using a suitable forming wheel.

A grinding machine constructed in accordance with the invention therefore preferably includes at least one forming wheel which is mounted so as to be capable of being engaged with the main grinding wheel to allow a groove in the latter to be formed and reformed as required.

This obviates problems which can arise when a grinding wheel is initially formed off machine and/or has to be removed to be reformed.

Position of forming/dressing wheels

Preferably and in accordance with another aspect of the invention, the forming wheel may be mounted on the workhead spindle, typically to the rear of the workpiece support.

Two forming wheels may be mounted on the workhead, one for forming grooves in new wheels and one for reforming grooves on existing wheels. Forming and reforming grinding wheel grooves on the machine and mounting the forming wheels on the workhead spindle reduces grinding wheel run-out to a minimum, reduces wheel chatter, and also ensures that even if imperfectly mounted, a true circular disc or wafer will be ground by the grinding wheel since the forming wheel, and reforming wheels are both mounted about the same axis as the workpiece.

Using one forming wheel for roughing and one for finishing both grinding wheels produces an identical form in both the roughing and finishing wheel grooves, thereby minimising asymmetric wear of the finishing wheel form.

Using slightly different forms in the two forming wheels ensures that a constant depth of material is removed from around the edge profile during finish grinding.

Mounting two completely different forms, allow rapid changeover between one form type and the other, without the need to change formers.

The use of a resin bonded CBN wheel for rough grinding wafers and discs as aforesaid represents an important advantage. If a coarse diamond grain grinding wheel were to be used it would be virtually impossible to form or reform the wheel using diamond formers.

Coarse and medium grain CBN is very easy to form using a diamond forming wheel. However fine grain CBN such as required for finish grinding wheels will not grind silicon. Finish grinding is therefore preferably achieved using a fine grain

diamond wheel which can be formed and reformed using diamond forming wheels.

The invention thus also lies in the combination of a tight stiffness loop between grinding wheel and workpiece support and the use of a relatively compliant resin bonded grinding wheel, together with a forming wheel which may be mounted on the wheelhead spindle, and which can be brought into play as and when required. These features, when combined, allow a high surface finish and low sub-surface damage edge to be produced on a workpiece.

Protection of edge grinding environment

According to another aspect of the invention, the grinding wheel and workpiece may be located in a two part housing, which are closed to form a sealed enclosure during grinding.

Preferably the housing parts are formed from a clear plastics material such as polycarbonate, to allow the grinding process to be viewed.

Preferably the two housing parts are sealed by means of an inflatable sealing ring which extends around the joint between the two housing parts when they are positioned so as to form the enclosure.

Where a two part enclosure is provided which when closed and sealed forms an enclosure, and the grinding wheel and workpiece are contained within the enclosure at least during grinding, the housing parts are preferably mounted on a slideway and are movable parallel to the axis about which the grinding wheel rotates, so as to permit axial travel of the workhead when moving between one wheel groove and another, or moving so as to engage a forming wheel with the grinding wheel, without the need to deflate and re-inflate the seal. This feature reduces grinding cycle time.

Swarf removal

According to another aspect of the invention, means may be provided to aim a jet of cleaning fluid at the overhanging lip of a wafer whilst the latter is still being rotated. This prevents grinding swarf from running down the rear of the wafer as it is removed from the support platen.

Where the grinding is performed in a sealed enclosure, the jet of cleaning fluid is preferably introduced into the enclosure and is only operable if the enclosure is closed.

According to a further preferred feature of the invention, a polishing disc may also be mounted on an edge grinding spindle.

A machine incorporating this facility would permit a three stage process to be performed on the same machine without demounting the workpiece namely rough grinding followed by finish grinding, followed by polishing.

Method of edge grinding

The invention additionally provides a method of grinding the edges of discs comprising the steps of providing a grinding wheel and a forming wheel on a stiff mounting, moving the grinding wheel and forming wheel into engagement so as to form a groove around the edge of the grinding wheel corresponding in cross-section to the complement of the shape to be formed around a disc edge during grinding, engaging the grinding wheel with a disc which is also stiffly mounted relative to the grinding wheel, grinding the edge thereof into the desired shape, and after the disc edge has been ground (or after a succession of disc edges have been ground), re-engaging the grinding wheel and the forming wheel to re-form the groove in the grinding wheel to correct for wear.

A grinding process for grinding the edge of a silicon wafer

workpiece may comprise two stages, a first in which a metal or resin bonded CBN wheel is advanced to rough grind the workpiece edge and a second stage in which a resin bonded CBN, or more preferably a resin bonded diamond wheel, is advanced to finish grind the edge, although the invention is not limited to this process and any number of different grinding steps may be incorporated into the process set up to grind any particular workpiece.

In accordance with the invention the method also includes the steps of forming and reforming both grinding wheels *in situ* on the machine by plunge grinding the desired form in the edge of each grinding wheel using a forming wheel.

Where both internal and external diameters are to be finish ground, a two-stage grinding process may be employed for both internal and external grinding, in which a rough grind using a pre-formed metal bonded wheel precedes a finish grind using a formed CBN resin bonded wheel which is formed and reformed *in situ* on the machine.

Apparatus for edge grinding

The invention also lies in apparatus for performing the above method comprising a grinding wheel and drive means therefor, a forming wheel, support means for the grinding wheel and forming wheel which is stiff to restrict unwanted relative movement therebetween, means for axially shifting the grinding wheel into alignment with the forming wheel, means for effecting relative movement between grinding and forming wheels to plunge grind the edge of the grinding wheel to form a groove therein of precise cross-section, a workpiece spindle on which a circular workpiece can be mounted, said spindle also being carried by the stiff support means, drive means for moving the grinding wheel towards and away from the workpiece spindle, to bring the wheel into engagement with a circular edge of a circular workpiece when mounted on the spindle to edge grind

the workpiece, and drive means for rotating the spindle wherein the forming wheel is also mounted on the workpiece spindle for rotation therewith.

Preferably the workpiece spindle includes a vacuum chuck for mounting a circular workpiece thereon.

Preferably means is provided for centering the circular workpiece so that its centre is aligned with the axis of the workpiece spindle.

Preferably the workpiece centering means is remote from the workpiece spindle and comprises an alignment vacuum chuck and associated detection system by which a workpiece can be rotated, to determine its true centre by detecting any eccentricity in its rotation due to misalignment and the said alignment chuck, pick and place robot arm means having a travelling vacuum chuck, robot drive means for positioning the chuck adjacent the alignment chuck to permit transfer of a workpiece from one to the other, and for moving the chuck and workpiece through precisely known distances along one or more known axes, so as to position the workpiece adjacent the vacuum chuck on the workpiece spindle for transfer thereto, the movement of the travelling chuck being under the control of a control system having programmed therein the coordinates of the alignment chuck axis and the workpiece spindle axis to permit accurate movement of the travelling chuck therebetween, and therein a correction is made to the final position of the travelling chuck in front of the workpiece spindle chuck by taking into account any eccentricity detected in the position of the workpiece on the alignment chuck by the detection system, whereby the workpiece is accurately centred relative to the workpiece spindle axis.

The detection system may comprise a video camera adapted to view the disc edge tangentially and a signal processing and computing system receptive of the video camera output signals,

and a visual display device such as a CRT for producing an enlarged display of the edge profile of the workpiece and/or data storage means containing data relating to a desired profile for electrical comparison with similar data derived from the edge under test, to generate a pass or fail signal or a shape quality signal.

Flat/notch grinding

The invention is also applicable to grinding machines capable of grinding a registration region around the periphery of a circular workpiece, such as a flat or a notch.

A flat is most simply formed on the peripheral edge thereof, by moving the grinding wheel spindle synchronously whilst the workpiece rotates, under computer control, so that the same region of the periphery is subjected to a different grinding treatment during each rotation so as to remove more metal thereover and describe a non-circular straight line region thereon.

A grinding machine adapted to grind notches includes a further grinding wheel spindle positioned so that a small diameter rotatable grinding device mounted thereon, whilst being rotated can be engaged with one region of the periphery of a circular workpiece component to grind a notch therein, under numerical/computer control.

Workpiece handling and checking

Robotic workpiece handling means is preferably provided for replacing a finished workpiece component with a further workpiece ready to be ground.

Means may also be provided for detecting wear of the profiling groove in the grinding wheel to interrupt the grinding of workpieces and allow for re-forming of the groove. To this end

means may be provided, responsive to the detection of wear to axially shift the work spindle and then advance it so that a forming wheel carried thereon to the rear of the workpiece, can re-form the grinding groove profile around the grinding wheel.

Grinding wheel diameter wear is most simply determined from the position at which touchdown occurs as the grinding wheel is advanced towards the workpiece. Electric and/or acoustic sensing may be employed for this purpose, and linked to position transducer for generating information related to the position of the grinding wheel as it is advanced towards the workpiece, to output the position of the wheel when touch-down is sensed.

Other types of wear may be detected by inspecting the edge of the workpiece after grinding and determining from the dimensions and/or the shape of the edge profile, whether the grinding wheel groove needs to be re-formed, or if an axial shift of the workhead is required so as to reposition the profile across the thickness of the wafer.

Preferably therefore in a machine adapted for grinding silicon wafers, edge inspection means is provided capable of on-line inspection of the wafer edge cross-sectional shape.

Edge inspection may be performed on each wafer, or on every nth wafer to be ground.

The edge inspection means is preferably opto-electric and produces electrical signals for processing and/or display in a digital display and/or on a CRT or the like, to reveal to an operator the dimensions, and/or the shape of the edge profile of the finished disc.

Optical inspection of the wafer edge profile is preferably performed with the wafer mounted in a vertical plane on a rotatable platen, typically a vacuum chuck.

By positioning an optical inspection means adjacent the workpiece spindle, the edge profile of a ground edge may be inspected without demounting the workpiece from the spindle, so that if grinding wheel groove wear, and/or unacceptable damage/incorrect profiling of the edge is determined, the grinding wheel groove may be re-formed and the workpiece edge re-ground without demounting the workpiece from the workhead.

Edge data can be compared with (or stored and subsequently compared with) a set of edge profile data taken from the edge of a reference workpiece.

The optical inspection means (whether on line or off line) may comprise a video camera for producing a video signal for processing, and positioned to view the edge of the workpiece substantially tangentially. Typically the camera is positioned so that its optical axis is tangential to the perimeter of the disc, so that the top of the cross sectional shape of the edge profile is in the middle of the field of view of the camera.

If this results in too little of the profile occupying the field of view, the camera can be shifted from that position so that the tip of the profile is shifted across the field of view, so that the optical axis now intersects the wafer.

The edge inspection may be automated by processing the signals from the edge viewing camera and generating control signals therefrom after comparison with stored data, eg to generate a warning signal and/or initiate a re-forming step.

The invention will now be described by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a perspective view not to scale of a grinding machine embodying the invention as viewed from the position normally occupied by an operator;

Figure 2 is a side view again not to scale, of the machine shown in Figure 1, again from the side on which the operator normally stands;

Figure 3 is an end view of the machine shown in Figures 1 and 2;

Figure 4 is a cross-section to a slightly larger scale through the flexure mounted sub-assemblies as viewed end-on in Figure 3;

Figure 5 is an enlarged scale view of two of the flexures visible in Figure 4;

Figure 6 is an enlarged cross-sectional view through the upper right hand end showing the cam drive and follower and the spring loading of the sub-assemblies;

Figure 7 is a side view of the sub-assembly end of the machine shown in Figure 2 to an enlarged scale and partly in section;

Figure 8 is a perspective view of a workpiece loading and unloading mechanism which is adapted to be mounted on the right hand side of the end of the machine shown in Figure 3, part of which is visible in Figure 8;

Figure 9 is an opposite perspective view of the component handling apparatus of Figure 8 which also shows disc inspection apparatus and the right hand end of the machine as shown in Figure 2;

Figure 10 is a perspective view from the opposite end of the disc inspection apparatus shown in Figure 9, to an enlarged scale;

Figure 11 is a view of the monitor screen showing the notch as viewed by camera 234;

Figure 12 is a view of the monitor screen showing a flat in a wafer edge as viewed by camera 234;

Figure 13 is a side view of the rear of the assembly of Figure 10, showing the drive between the motor and vacuum chuck, and also showing where a thickness measuring probe can be positioned for determining wafer thickness before transferring the wafer to the workhead.

Figure 14 is a side view of a multiple grinding wheel assembly such as may be used in the machine show in Figure 1 et seq;

Figure 15 is a side view of a notch grinding wheel such as may be employed in that machine;

Figure 16 is a side view of a workpiece vacuum chuck and dressing wheel assembly; and

Figure 17 is a side view of a wash station which can also serve as an intermediate wafer store.

Detailed description of the drawings

Figures 1, 2 and 3 illustrate pictorially part of an overall machine station for edge grinding circular discs (wafers) of silicon or similar material. Workpiece handling inspection and centering facilities also form part of the overall machine but will be described with reference to later views in the drawings.

The machine shown in Figures 1 to 3 comprises a control cabinet 10 from which extends a machine bed 12 which carries a floating platform 14 carried on three vibration absorbing feet, one of which can be seen in Figure 1 at 16 and the second part 18 is mounted centrally before the base region 22 and is shown in dotted outline in Figure 1, and the third can be seen at 20 in Figure 3.

The platform 14 includes an integral support structure or base 22 which carries a workhead 24 which is slidable axially along a slideway 26 mounted on an upper surface of the base 22 and which includes a spindle drive motor 28 and vacuum chuck 30 for carrying wafers to be ground.

Edge grinding is achieved by means of a grinding wheel 32 containing a number of annular grooves such as 34 for engaging the edge of a wafer workpiece designated in Figure 2 at 36.

The grinding wheel spindle (not shown) carried in bearing assembly 38 is rotated by an electric motor 40.

Items 38 and 40 are carried on a support generally designated 42 which is mounted close to the centre line of the platform 14 to one side of a rigid strengthening plate 44 which is bolted through flanges to the platform 14 along its base and is secured at its upper end by bolts through another flange 46 to the machine base 22. The function of the plate 44 is to increase the rigidity of the platform 14 relative to the base

22 and resist transverse vibrations which might otherwise be introduced.

Equidistant from and on the other side of the plate 44 is a second support 48 which carries a slideway 50 on which is mounted a second spindle drive 52 for a notch grinding spindle. Axial movement of the spindle drive 52 is provided by a drive unit 54 (see Figure 2). The spindle drive 52 can also be used to grind the internal diameter of an annular disc.

The workhead edge grinding and notch grinding spindles are mounted in air bearings and the workhead spindle typically has a speed range of 2 to 1000 revs per minute, the edge grinding spindle typically has a speed range up to 6000 revolutions per minute and the notch griding spindle speed is typically up to 70,000 revolutions per minute.

On the workhead spindle to the rear of the chuck 30 are mounted forming wheels best seen in Figure 2 at 56 and 58. Indexing the workhead 24 in the direction of the arrow 60 in Figure 2 allows the workpiece disc 36 to be engaged by one of the slots such as 34 in the grinding wheel 32 and further movement in the direction of the arrow 60 allows the disc 36 to clear the end face 62 of the grinding wheel assembly and to allow the forming wheels 56 or 58 to engage in the appropriate grooves in the grinding wheel 32.

Lateral movement of the grinding wheel or notch grinder as required is achieved by tilting the support structures 42 and 48 as appropriate relative to the platform 14. To this end both of the structures 42 and 48 are pivotally attached to the platform 14 near the centre line thereof (as will be described in more detail in relation to later figures) and two stops 64 and 66 respectively (see Figure 3) prevent excessive outward movement.

In accordance with the invention, the pivoting is provided by

means of flexures (as will be described) which allow for pivoting movement about two parallel axes close to the centre line of the platform 14 so that structure 42 can describe a small arc such as denoted by arrow 68 and structure 48 can describe an arc as denoted by reference numeral 70.

Drive means for achieving the pivoting movement will be described with reference to later figures.

Attached to the base 22 is a clear Polycarbonate rectilinear housing 72 through which the grinding wheel spindle protrudes. A large, generally oval opening 74 in the face of the housing 72 allows a similarly shaped closure 76 mounted on the workhead 24 to enter and seal off the opening 74 upon appropriate forward movement of the workhead 24 in the direction of the arrow 60 as aforesaid.

An inflatable ring seal 78 around the closure 76 (or alternatively around the internal lip of the opening 74) provides for a fluid tight seal between the closure 76 and the opening 74.

The housing 72 is slidable relative to the base 22 and bellows seals 80 and 82 are provided between the spindle drives 38 and 52 so that after the seal has been made between the closure 76 and the opening 74, the housing 72 will in fact move axially with the workhead assembly 24. Sufficient clearance is provided to the rear of the bellows to allow the housing 72 to move in a continuing sense in the direction of the arrow 60 to allow for the grooves in the grinding wheel to be formed. Movement in the opposite sense is also accommodated by the bellows 80 and 82 so that the closed housing 72 can also follow the workhead 24 as it moves in an opposite sense to that of arrow 60 to allow for the edge of the disc 36 to be engaged by one of the grinding grooves such as 34.

Coolant fluid is sprayed onto the workpiece through nozzles 84

and 86 and similar nozzles are provided for spraying similar fluid onto the forming wheels when required. An interlock is provided to prevent coolant fluid being jetted unless the housing 72 is closed and sealed by the closure 76.

After a grinding operation has been completed and after a final wash with fluid, the housing 72 can be opened by deflating the edge seal 78 and withdrawing the workhead 24 in a direction opposite to that of arrow 60 to the position shown in Figure 2. The finished workpiece 36 can then be demounted and a fresh workpiece installed.

Wheel forming/dressing

Wheel forming can be performed initially before any workpiece has been mounted, in which case the housing 72 is closed by appropriate movement of the workhead 24 and closure 76 without first mounting a workpiece such as 36 on the chuck 30. Wheel forming is performed by appropriate axial movement of the workhead 24 and lateral movement of support 42, so that each of the grooves in turn, such as groove 34, is engaged by the appropriate forming wheel such as 56 or 58. Coolant fluid is provided during the wheel forming operation.

After initial wheel forming, the assembly may be separated by breaking the seal 78 as before mentioned. After mounting a workpiece 36 the assembly can be closed again and grinding undertaken as before described.

Typically re-forming of the groove is performed during machine downtime after one workpiece has been removed and before a subsequent workpiece has been installed, but in a development of the machine in which edge profile checking of the workpiece 36 is performed *in situ* on the workhead, it may be advantageous to allow for re-forming with the workpiece in place.

Notching

If a workpiece is to be notched, the support 42 is moved laterally to disengage the wheel from the workpiece and support 48 is moved laterally instead so as to engage the edge of the workpiece 36 by the notching spindle (not shown). After notching, the support 48 is moved in an opposite sense so as to disengage the spindle from the workpiece.

Polishing

In an alternative arrangement, a polishing wheel may be mounted on the wheel spindle as well as the grooved grinding wheels, and by axially shifting the workpiece spindle, so the polishing wheel can be brought into engagement with the edge of the workpiece 36.

A drive for shifting the workhead 24 along the slideway 26 is provided at 88.

As shown in Figure 3, a drainpipe 90 conveys fluid from the housing 72 to a storage tank 92 and a pump (not shown) is provided to recirculate the fluid from the tank. A filter may be provided in the tank or in the line between the tank and the pump.

The control housing 10 includes a television display 94 and keyboard 96 and a hand-held control unit 98 is connected via a flying lead 100 to a connection plug 102. An operator can remove the unit 98 and walk to the machine with the unit 98 in his hand, and by pressing appropriate buttons instigate or arrest operation of the machine. The housing 10 houses a computer based control system for supplying control signals and power to the drives on the machine and for receiving signals from transducers, switching and other position/operation/touch etc signal generating sensors on the machine.

A computer keyboard and display may be used to enter data for initially setting up the machine functions, and for determining the spindle speeds, feed rates, stroke and sequence of events.

Since clean room conditions may be required, the whole machine with the exception of the corner of the control unit containing the computer screen and keyboard, may be housed within an external enclosure. The external enclosure is not shown in the drawings.

The slideway 26 on which the workhead slides, is preloaded, and the workhead is driven by servomotors and fitted with a high resolution position coder to provide smooth motion during axis move interpolation.

Grinding infeed is achieved as previously described by tilting the structures 42 or 48 as required to bring the grinding element carried thereon into engagement with the edge of the workpiece 36. Although the movement is not truly linear, but arcuate, this can be accommodated in the control signals generated by the control system housed within the housing 10.

Whilst the jets such as 84 and 86 can be used to supply cutting fluid during grinding, they or other jets may be used to direct jets of cleaning fluid at the overhanging lip of the wafer whilst it is still being rotated but after grinding. This prevents grinding swarf from running down the back face of the wafer as it is removed from the chuck.

Grinding process

Typically edges are ground in a two-stage process using a plunge grind roughing operation and a second plunge grind finish cycle which includes a rapid advance of the grinding wheel until a touch sensor detects contact with the workpiece wafer. The grinding wheel axis position at touchdown is used to monitor wheel wear and to ensure that the material removed

per finish cut cycle is kept constant. Grinding wheelforms are maintained by using metal bonded diamond forming wheels permanently mounted on the workhead chuck. The reforming process can be fully automatic and can be programmed to occur every nth wafer, or whenever the ground edge profile becomes unacceptable (as determined by optical inspection of the disc edge profile) or when the touchdown point indicates excessive wheel wear.

Damping

In order to reduce unwanted vibration and resulting grinding damage to the minimum, the structural components making up the grinding machine are filled at least partially with polymer concrete, particularly sections of the base 22 and the bed 12 and if desired also the platform 14.

Subassembly flexure mounting

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate how the two structures 42 and 48 are mounted for hinging movement to permit wheel infeed. As shown in Figure 4, the inboard edges of the two structures 42 and 48 are connected to the platform 14 by means of flexures (sometimes referred to as strip-hinges) two of which are shown at 102 and 104. A second pair in line with the two shown in Figure 4 are provided towards the other end of the structures 42 and 48 nearer to the machine base 22.

As shown in Figure 5 to an enlarged scale, each flexure comprises a metal plate, a central region of which is necked to form a reduced width section 106 in the case of flexure 102 and 108 in the case of flexure 104.

The thicker upper and lower regions of each plate denoted by 110 and 112 in the case of 102 and 114 and 116 respectively in the case of flexure 104 are bolted by means of bolts such as 118 and 120 in the case of flexure 102 on the one hand to a

flange 122 which forms an integral part of the structure 42 and on the other hand to a metal block 124 itself bolted by means of bolts such as 126 and 128 to the platform 14.

In the same way the flexure 104 is secured to a flange 126 which extends from and forms an integral part of the structure 48.

The metal block 124 is spaced vertically from the flanges 122 and 126 and the necked region 106 and 108 of each of the flexures permits a rocking of the structure 42 or 48 respectively about the necked region 106 and 108 respectively of the flexures supporting the structure from the platform 14.

Whilst the flexures 102 and 104 permit tilting of the structures as denoted by arrows 130 and 132 in Figure 5, they do not readily permit any other movement of the structures 42 and 48 relative to the platform 14 about any other axis. Consequently the coupling of the structures 42 and 48 to the platform 14 is very stiff in all directions except about the hinge axis generated by the reduced section regions 106 108 etc.

Infeed drive to sub-assemblies

Movement of the structures 42 and 48 is achieved by means of a cam and follower arrangement acting between each of the structures and rigid assemblies mounted to the platform 14 and the end of the machine base 22. One such drive is shown in Figure 4 as provided within the structure 42. Here a cam 134 is carried by a shaft 136 itself carried in bearings 138 and 140, and is driven by an electric motor 142 through a torsion rigid coupling 144. A follower 146 carried on a shaft (not shown) is carried in bearings 148 and 150 is mounted to the structure 142.

The drive and bearing assembly containing the cam 134 is

supported within a rigid structural framework generally designated 152 and this is separate and spaced from the rest of the structure 42 so that the latter can move relative to the assembly 152 as dictated by the movement of the cam 134 and follower 146.

The return force is provided by spring means acting between the structure 152 and the structure 42.

The unit 48 is driven in a similar manner by a similar assembly contained in a structure 154 shown generally in the cut-away region of the structure 48 in Figure 4.

For simplicity, detail of the return spring is shown in connection with structure 48 but no attempt has been made to show this in the structure 42. Here a thrust rod 156 is secured by means of a threaded and bolted end 158 to the inboard structural component 160 of the structure 48 and the spring 162 is housed within a cylindrical recess 164 formed in the structure 154. A reduced diameter end region 166 prevents the spring from leaving the chamber 164 and a captive washer 168 at the outboard end of the thrust rod 156 holds the spring captive. Movement of the structure element 48 in the direction of arrow 170 results in compression of the spring which provides a restoring force to return the item 48 to its normal upright position when the camming force is removed.

Figure 6 shows the upper end of the unit 42 to a larger scale and the same reference numerals have been used throughout to denote similar parts.

Cam drive

Figure 7 is a side view of the end of the machine shown partly in section in Figure 4, albeit to a slightly reduced scale. As with the other views, it is shown partly cut-away so as to reveal the cam drive mechanism generally designated 170 which

acts on the structure 48 and is not shown in Figure 4. The captive washer 168 is shown at the side of the drive mechanism.

Figure 7 also shows the two flexure mountings at the base of the unit 48, the outboard one being designated 104 and the inboard one being designated 172.

As previously mentioned each of the cam drive arrangements is carried within a rigid housing 152 and 154 and the latter is more clearly visible in Figure 7 as is the horizontal leg 174 by which it is bolted to a protruding plate from the end of the base 22.

Also visible in Figure 7 is the motor 176 for driving the chuck 178 from which the notch grinding spindle 180 protrudes. The motor 176 is carried within a housing 52 previously described in respect of Figure 1, and the housing 52 slides along a slideway 50 as previously described.

Figure 7 shows the bellows seal 82 attaching the housing 52 sealingly to the opening in the casing 72 through which the motor 176 and spindle protrude.

Workpiece transfer

The handling of circular plate-like wafers of silicon typically 100 200 or 300mm diameter or larger is provided by a robotic handling means shown in Figure 8. This comprises a base 182 and structural framework generally designated 184 extending upwardly therefrom to provide a support for a linear slideway generally designated 186 along which a carriage 188 can slide in the direction of the arrow 190. A second slide 192 protrudes from the housing 188 at right angles to the slideway 186 and a sliding member 194 is adapted to move therealong in the direction of the arrow 196. An arm 198 protrudes from the housing 194 and a drive attached thereto and shown at 200 provides for movement of the arm 198 in the direction of the

arrow 202. Electric power for the drives 200 and the drives in the housing 188 is provided via a multi-way umbilical 204 which is retained in a flexible safety harness 206 attached to the linear track 186.

The lower end of the arm 198 is a vacuum chuck 208 and by suitable manoeuvring of the carriages 188 and 200 and the arm 198, so the vacuum closure 208 can be positioned in front of a wafer 210 which is held upright in a supporting sleeve 212. An empty supporting sleeve at 214 is also shown ready to receive a processed wafer.

The base 182 is positioned close to the machine bed 12 part of which is visible in Figure 8. After a machining operation, the two parts of the housing 72 are separated as previously described with references to Figures 1 to 3, and this leaves the finished workpiece 36 exposed and available to be picked up by the arm 198 and vacuum chuck 208. To this end the transfer mechanism of Figure 8 is operated so as to position the chuck 208 opposite the wafer on the workhead so as to retrieve the finished wafer 36 and transfer this to the empty sleeve 214.

Movement of the carriage 194 further out towards the sleeve 212 positions the chuck 208 in front of an unground workpiece 210, and after picking this up, it can be transferred into the inspection station and thereafter the working environment of the grinding machine for attachment to the vacuum chuck 30 in place of the previous wafer 36, for grinding.

It will be appreciated that a plurality of sleeves or cassettes can be provided on the track 216 and all the workpieces located therein can be removed, centred, ground, inspected and returned thereto in turn.

Where an overall enclosure is provided for the apparatus as previously described, the transfer mechanism including its base

182 is preferably located within the enclosure, and a self closing door in an opening therein, is provided to allow cleaned wafers to be inserted and removed.

Wafer centering

As an intermediate step before and after grinding, (preferably during the grinding of another wafer), each of the wafers is positioned in the inspection apparatus shown in Figures 9 and 10, to enable the centre of the wafer to be determined, and thereby allow it to be accurately positioned on the chuck 30 for grinding, and afterwards to enable the edge profile of the wafer to be inspected after grinding, before it is returned to its storage sleeve.

Workpiece inspection

Figure 9 is an overall view showing where the inspection apparatus sits in relation to the grinding machine and the robotic wafer handling system of Figure 8. As before the same reference numerals are used throughout. The robotic wafer handling system is more fully described in our copending UK Patent Application filed concurrently herewith under our reference C403/W.

The inspection apparatus comprises a stand 218 on which is located a support framework comprised of a base 220 and an upright plate 222. A triangular stiffening plate 224 extends from the rear of the plate 222 and both 222 and 224 are welded to the plate 220 as at 226.

Spaced from vertical edge 228 of the plate 222 is a support bracket 230, and a lamp and projection lens arrangement generally designated 232 is supported at the upper end of the bracket 230. A first camera 234 having a lens 236 is mounted on the plate 222 to view the edge of the disc 238 which is back lit by lamp 232.

As best seen in Figure 9 a motor 240 is mounted on the rear of the plate 222. The motor drives a vacuum chuck (not visible) on which the disc 238 which is to be inspected is planted by the robotic arm 198 and vacuum chuck 208.

Rotation of the motor 240 rotates the wafer 238. By positioning this so that the edge intersects the field of view of the camera lens 236 electrical signals can be derived from the camera output for feeding via a cable 242 to signal analysis apparatus (not shown) for processing data obtained from the signals.

A second camera 244 is mounted on the support plate edge 228, to view the edge of the disc 238 tangentially, so as to obtain information on the profile of the edge. The disc edge is back lit by lamp 246 and signals from the camera 244 are supplied along cable 248. Power for the lamps 232 and 246 is supplied as required along cables 250 and 252 respectively.

A computer 254 is supplied with signals from the cameras 234 and via cables 242 and 248 and controls the cameras and their lamps 232 and 246 via return signal paths along 242 and 248 and via cables 250 and 252 respectively. The output camera 244 can be displayed on a monitor 256 as required, and the profile of the edge of the wafer 238 is shown at 258 together eg with a computer generated template 260, 262 showing the ideal angle for the sides of the profile.

Workpiece centering

This is achieved using the technique described in our copending application filed concurrently herewith under reference C403/W, using the robotic wafer handling system of Figures 8 to 10 and the signals from camera 234, obtained as the circular wafer is rotated through its field of view.

Display of notches and flats

Figure 11 is a view of the monitor 256, this time set to display the output from camera 234, when a notched wafer is in position on the vacuum chuck (not shown in Figure 10) on which the wafer 238 is mounted, where the wafer has been rotated so that the notch is in the field of view of the camera. The notch is visible at 264 and a computer generated template (shown dotted at 266 and 268) is also shown displayed, superimposed on the picture of the notch, to indicate the required angles for the two sides of the notch. Two additional template lines are displayed at 270 and 272 to show the required radii at the entrance to the notch and a further template line 274 is displayed showing the required radius at the bottom of the notch.

Figure 12 is a similar view of the monitor 256 this time displaying one end of a flat peripheral region of a circular wafer if viewed by the camera 234. Here the display of the wafer is denoted by reference numeral 276 and the flat by 278 and the required radii at the ends of the flat is described by a computer generated template line 280.

Wafer thickness measurement

Figure 13 shows the rear of the assembly of Figure 10 and shows the plate 222 and motor 240 driving a vacuum chuck 284 via a drive 286.

A fluid line 290 with jet 292 serves to deliver a jet of air to clean and dry the edge of the wafer 238 and the flow is controlled by a valve 294.

It is important to know the thickness of the wafer 238 before it is mounted on the vacuum chuck 30 on the workhead (see Figures 1 and 2) so that the axial shift required of the workhead or workspindle to bring the appropriate grinding

groove therein accurately into engagement with the edge of the disc, can be determined by the control system and appropriate drive signals generated for moving the workhead or work spindle the required distance. The thickness is determined using a probe 296 which is carried on a spindle 298 slideable in guides 300, 302 and movable under air pressure via a pipeline 304 into engagement with the face of the wafer 238. The distance travelled from a fixed home position is noted.

By performing the same distance movement measurement without the wafer in place, given the distance from the fixed home position to the face of the chuck 284, and since the wafer 238 is held against that face when in position, the difference between the two distance measurements is equal to the thickness of the wafer.

The distance moved by the probe is sensed by an accurate position sensing encoder and the signals supplied along cable 306 to the computer 254, and the thickness dimension may be displayed on the monitor (if desired).

The computer 254 may form part of the computer based control system in housing 10 (see Figure 1) and/or signals generated by the computer 254 may be supplied to the computer based control system in 10, so that the thickness dimension is available for controlling the axial shift of the workhead or work spindle assembly.

Multiple grinding wheel assembly

In order to save machine downtime, the grinding wheel may be made up of a sandwich of different grinding wheels each dedicated to a particular purpose.

Such a wheel is shown at 308 in Figure 14, in which a sandwich of four wheel sections is shown.

The primary wheel 310 is a resin bonded CBN wheel having six grinding grooves in its cylindrical surface, one of which is shown at 312. This is the wheel section which is used to grind the edge of a wafer which requires only a little material to be removed before finishing.

Wheel section 314 is a diamond wheel containing three grooves, one denoted by reference 316. This section is used for finish grinding the wafer edge.

It is to be understood that both wheels can have any number of grooves - typically in the range 1-10.

Wheel section 318 is a metal bonded CBN or diamond wheel with a single groove 320, which is an optional wheel which can be used to rough grind a wafer edge before the softer resin bonded wheel 310 is brought into play.

Wheel section 322 is a further optional wheel typically of cerium oxide, which can be used to polish the wafer edge after finishing by wheel section 314, by running the wheel spindle at an appropriate speed.

Notch grinding wheel

Figure 15 shows to an approximately similar scale, a notch grinding wheel 324 mounted at the end of a spindle 326. Its "concave" annular grinding surface is typically diamond plated.

Wheel dressing procedure

As shown in Figure 16, the dressing/forming wheel(s) are mounted on the same spindle as the vacuum chuck 30 to which the workpiece(s)/wafer(s) 36 are to be attached.

Typically the dressing/forming wheel is a two part assembly of:

(a) a metal bonded diamond wheel 328 for rough grinding grooves in the CBN wheel section 310, of Figure 14, and

(b) a metal bonded diamond wheel 330 which incorporates much smaller diameter grit, and is adapted to finish grind the grooves such as 312 in the CBN wheel section 310 of Figure 14.

CBN grinding wheel such as section 310 in Figure 14 are normally supplied without grooves such as 312, and after mounting a new CBN wheel section 310, the first step is the formation of grooves such as 312 thereon. This is achieved using wheel 328 of Figure 16, and then wheel 330.

After wear has occurred in the grooves in 310, wheel 330 is employed to dress and re-form the grooves as required.

Both forming wheels have access to both grinding wheels. Conventionally, both forming wheels are used to form both the roughing (CBN) grinding wheel and the finishing (diamond) grinding wheel.

Intermediate wafer store

As shown in Figure 17, below the thickness measuring probe location shown in Figure 13, is situated an open top rectilinear housing 332 into which wafers can be lowered by the arm 198.

Extending into the housing is a spindle 334 and vacuum chuck 336 on which wafers can be planted and held, and by which such wafers can be rotated. Drive to the spindle 334 may be obtained for example from the motor 240.

Protruding into the housing 332 is a jet 338 which can be supplied with fluid under pressure such as water or air, and the jet is directed towards the face and edge region of wafers mounted on the chuck. One such wafer is shown at 340. A drain

342 conveys away any surplus fluid.

The housing and vacuum chuck provides a useful parking place for wafers which have been edge ground and are waiting to be placed on the vacuum chuck 284 of the inspection apparatus, for edge profile inspection, or have been inspected and are waiting to be returned to their sleeve such as 214 in Figure 8.

C456/W

CLAIMS

1. A grinding or polishing machine comprising a rigid platform on which a workhead spindle and a grinding wheel spindle are located, and wherein the grinding wheel spindle is mounted on a sub-assembly which is attached to the platform by means of flexures which permit limited movement of the sub-assembly in a direction generally parallel to the direction in which the wheel has to advance to achieve grinding or polishing of a workpiece mounted on the workhead spindle, the flexures generally inhibiting movement of the sub-assembly in all other directions.
2. A machine as claimed in claim 1, wherein two grinding wheels are mounted on the platform, one on each of two sub-assemblies, and each sub-assembly is attached to the platform by flexures as aforesaid.
3. A machine as claimed in claim 2, wherein the sub-assembly mounting flexures provide smooth motion and only permit movement in one direction so that axis reversal hysteresis is much lower than is the case where conventional linear axes are used.
4. A machine as claimed in claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein the positions of the flexures mounting the sub-assemblies to the machine base are selected so as to reduce the effect of torsional vibration within the machine base on the sub-assemblies carried by the flexures.
5. A machine as claimed in claim 4, wherein the flexure mounting points are located generally centrally of the machine and are located on either side of and close to the machine centre line.

6. A machine as claimed in any of claims 2 to 5, wherein the flexures on which the sub-assemblies are mounted are themselves attached to a solid mass, forming part of the base of the machine, so that any motion of the sub-assembly or carriage is highly damped.
7. A machine as claimed in claim 6, wherein the solid mass includes polymer concrete.
8. A machine as claimed in any of claims 1 to 7, wherein hollow cavities within selected parts of the machine are at least partially filled with polymer concrete so as to raise the natural frequency of vibration of the machine parts with the objective of providing minimum mass and distribution of the damping/stiffening material.
9. A machine as claimed in any of claims 1 to 8, wherein the flexures comprise stress relieved steel links which are directly jointed to the platform on the one hand and spindle bearing sub-assemblies on the other.
10. A machine as claimed in any of claims 1 to 9, in which the sub-assemblies are mounted on a horizontal extension of the machine base, towards one end of the general mass of the machine and rigidity of the horizontal extension is improved by mounting a rigid bracket between the extension and an end of the remaining mass of the machine.
11. A machine as claimed in claim 10, wherein the sub-assemblies are mounted symmetrically about the centre line of the base and are spaced apart and the bracket extends along the centre line of the machine between the two sub-assemblies.
12. A machine as claimed in claim 10 or 11, wherein coulomb damping is effected by forming the bracket from three pieces and bolting them together.

13. A machine as claimed in any of claims 1 to 12, wherein the platform is itself mounted through vibration absorbing means to a fixed machine base.

14. A machine as claimed in claim 13, wherein the machine base is a single piece fabrication, or comprises a two-part structure with vibration absorbing means between the two parts.

15. A machine as claimed in claim 14, wherein one part of a two part structure is mounted above the other with the vibration isolation means in between, the upper of the two parts is a metal fabrication which contains or is at least in part formed from polymer concrete so as to provide a direct, highly damped link between the mountings for the cams which move the spindles and the sub-assemblies and the workhead spindle guideway means.

16. A machine as claimed in any of claims 1 to 15, wherein the effect of torsional vibrations of the machine base on the tool stability is reduced by mounting the tool spindle and work spindle carrying sub-assemblies in a central position on the machine base.

17. A grinding or polishing machine having workpiece spindle means, tool spindle means mounted on sub-assemblies which permit limited relative movement in one direction to effect tool and workpiece engagement and cam drive means whereby each sub-assembly is movable to advance or retract each tool spindle towards and away from the workhead spindle.

18. A machine as claimed in claim 17, wherein solid cams are employed.

19. A machine as claimed in claim 18, wherein the cam means operates in one sense only in which event return spring means is provided for providing a restoring force in the opposite sense.

20. A machine as claimed in claim 19, wherein the cam means operates in both senses so that positive drive is provided to both advance and retract the sub-assembly towards and away from the workhead spindle.

21. A machine as claimed in claim 20, wherein the two sub-assemblies are spring loaded apart and the grinding feed is provided by appropriate inward movement of the cam arms, which allows rapid interpolation around the corners of silicon wafer flats, since the maximum sub-assembly acceleration forces act outwards, towards the cams.

22. A machine as claimed in any of claims 17 to 21, wherein the cams are mounted close to the workhead axis bearing and are directly linked by polymer concrete so that a tight and damped stiffness loop is produced.

23. A machine as claimed in any of claims 1 to 22, for grinding the edge of silicon discs (wafers) in which the grinding wheel is resin bonded CBN, or diamond or metal bonded CBN.

24. A machine as claimed in claim 23, wherein different types of grinding wheel are mounted on the same spindle.

25. A machine as claimed in claim 23 or 24, wherein each grinding wheel is provided with at least one and typically a plurality of grooves, which can be used in turn, as each becomes worn, until all the grooves need re-forming.

26. A machine as claimed in any of claims 23 to 25 further comprising a forming wheel mounted in the region of the grinding wheel, and means for effecting relative movement to permit the grinding wheel to be formed or re-formed in situ.

27. A machine as claimed in claim 26, wherein the forming wheel is mounted on the workhead spindle, to the rear of a

workpiece support.

28. A machine as claimed in claim 26, wherein two forming wheels are mounted on the workhead spindle.

29. A machine as claimed in claim 28, wherein one of the forming wheels is used to form grooves in new wheels and the other reforms grooves on existing wheels.

30. A machine as claimed in claim 28, wherein one forming wheel is used for roughing and another for finishing both grinding wheels to produce an identical form in both the roughing and finishing wheel grooves, so asymmetric wear of the finishing wheel form is reduced.

31. A machine as claimed in claim 28, wherein the two forming wheels have slightly different forms so that a constant depth of material is removed from around the edge profile during finish grinding.

32. A machine as claimed in claim 28, wherein the two forming wheels have different forms thereby allowing rapid changeover between one form type and another.

33. A machine as claimed in any of claims 26 o 32, wherein one of the grinding wheels is a fine grain diamond wheel and one of the forming wheels is a diamond wheel.

34. A method of grinding the edge of a disc using a machine in which a grinding wheel and a forming wheel are carried on a stiff mounting, comprising the steps of moving the grinding wheel and forming wheel into engagement so as to form a groove around the edge of the grinding wheel corresponding in cross-section to the complement of the shape to be formed around a disc edge during grinding, engaging the grinding wheel with a disc which is also stiffly mounted relative to the grinding wheel, grinding the edge thereof into the desired shape, and

after the disc edge has been ground (or after a succession of disc edges have been ground), re-engaging the grinding wheel and the forming wheel to re-form the groove in the grinding wheel to correct for wear.

35. A grinding process for grinding the edge of a silicon wafer workpiece comprising two stages, a first in which a metal or resin bonded CBN wheel is advanced to rough grind the workpiece edge and a second stage in which a resin bonded CBN, or more preferably a resin bonded diamond wheel, is advanced to finish grind the edge.

36. The method of claim 34 in which the step of forming or reforming both grinding wheels is performed with the wheels in situ on the machine by plunge grinding the desired form in the edge of each grinding wheel using a forming wheel.

37. Apparatus for edge grinding or polishing a disc workpiece comprising a grinding wheel and drive means therefor, a forming wheel, support means for the grinding wheel and forming wheel which is stiff to restrict unwanted relative movement therebetween, means for effecting relative movement to cause the grinding wheel to align with the forming wheel, means for effecting relative movement between grinding and forming wheels to plunge grind the edge of the grinding wheel to form a groove therein of precise cross-section, a workpiece spindle on which a circular workpiece can be mounted, said spindle also being carried by the stiff support means, drive means for moving the grinding wheel towards and away from the workpiece spindle, to bring the wheel into engagement with a circular edge of a circular workpiece when mounted on the spindle to edge grind the workpiece, and drive means for rotating the spindle, wherein the forming wheel is also mounted on the workpiece spindle for rotation therewith.

38. Apparatus as claimed in claim 37, wherein the workpiece spindle includes a vacuum chuck for mounting a workpiece

thereon.

39. Apparatus as claimed in claim 38, which further comprises means for centering a circular workpiece so that its centre is aligned with the axis of the workpiece spindle.

40. Apparatus as claimed in claim 39, wherein the workpiece centering means is remote from the workpiece spindle and comprises an alignment vacuum chuck and associated detection system by which a workpiece can be rotated, to determine its true centre by detecting any eccentricity in its rotation due to misalignment with the said alignment chuck, pick and place robot arm means having a travelling vacuum chuck, robot drive means for positioning the chuck adjacent the alignment chuck to permit transfer of a workpiece from one to the other, and for moving the chuck and workpiece through precisely known distances along one or more known axes, so as to position the workpiece adjacent the vacuum chuck on the workpiece spindle for transfer thereto, the movement of the travelling chuck being under the control of a control system having programmed therein the coordinates of the alignment chuck axis and the workpiece spindle axis to permit accurate movement of the travelling chuck therebetween, and therein a correction is made to the final position of the travelling chuck in front of the workpiece spindle chuck by taking into account any eccentricity detected in the position of the workpiece on the alignment chuck by the detection system, whereby the workpiece is accurately centred relative to the workpiece spindle axis.

41. Apparatus as claimed in claim 40, wherein the detection system comprises a video camera adapted to view the disc edge tangentially and a signal processing and a computing system receptive of the video camera output signals, or a digitised form thereof and a visual display device such as a CRT for producing an enlarged display of the edge profile of the workpiece and/or data storage means containing data relating to a desired profile for electrical comparison with similar

data derived from the edge under test, to generate a pass or fail signal or a shape quality signal.

42. Apparatus for edge grinding or polishing as claimed in claim 36, further comprising robotic workpiece handling means for replacing a finished workpiece component with a further workpiece ready to be ground.

43. Apparatus as claimed in claim 36, further comprising means for detecting wear of the profiling groove in the grinding wheel to interrupt the grinding of workpieces and allow for re-forming the groove.

44. Apparatus as claimed in claim 42, which includes drive means responsive to the detection of wear, to axially shift the work spindle and advance it so that a forming wheel carried thereon to the rear of the workpiece, is positioned to re-form the grinding groove profile around the grinding wheel.

45. Apparatus as claimed in claim 43 or 44, wherein electric and/or acoustic sensing is employed to detect the point of touchdown, which is linked to position transducer for generating information related to the a position of the grinding wheel as it is advanced towards the workpiece, to output the position of the wheel when touch-down is sensed.

46. Optic electronic inspection means for use with apparatus as claimed in any of claims 37 to 45, for viewing the edge of a ground disc workpiece (whether on line or off line) comprising a video camera for producing a video signal for processing, and positioned to view the edge of the workpiece substantially tangentially, in which the camera is positioned so that its optical axis is tangential to the perimeter of the disc, so that the top of the cross sectional shape of the edge profile is in the middle of the field of view of the camera.

47. Opto-electronic inspection means as claimed in claim 46,

in which the camera is adjustable so that the tip of the profile in the field of view is shifted across the field of view, so that the optical axis now intersects the wafer.

48. Opto-electronic edge inspection means as claimed in claim 45 or 46, which is automated by processing the signals from the edge viewing camera and generating control signals therefrom after comparison with stored data, to generate a warning signal and/or initiate a re-forming step, depending on the signal generated from the comparison.

49. Disc workpieces when ground or polishing using machines or apparatus or by a method as claimed in any of the preceding claims.



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Databases searched:

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UK Cl (Ed.O): B3D

Int Cl (Ed.6): B24B, B23Q

Other:

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Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
A	GB 2291783 A (SEIMITSU)	
A	GB 0885062 A (JONES & SHIPMAN)	
X	US 4607461 A (ADAMS)	1-4,8

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| X | Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step | A | Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art. |
| Y | Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category. | P | Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention. |
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